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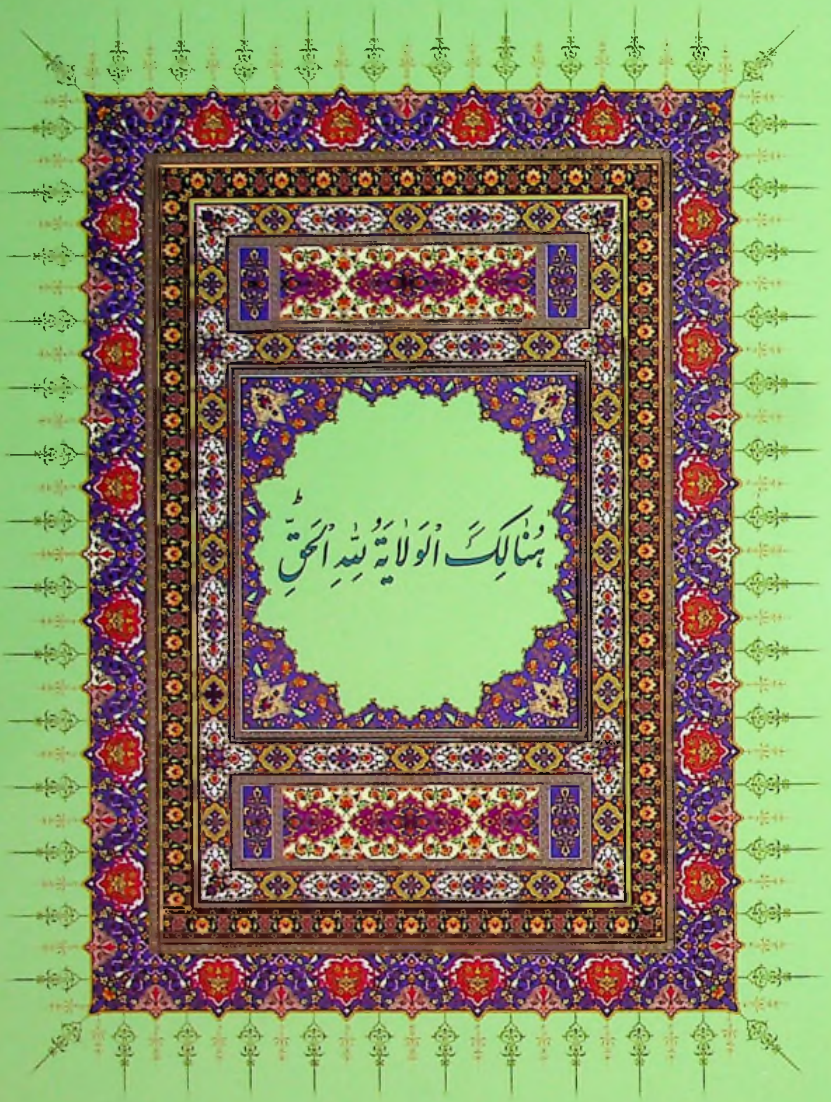

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community to move beyond "Shī'ism" and use the proper term used by the Imāms and their followers, 'Tashayyu'.

The editors would like to express the sincerest gratitude to the efforts of Parviz Morewedge of GLOBAL SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS, and Mehdi Faridzadeh of the CONSORTIUM OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR CULTURAL STUDIES, in the launching of this journal. Their tireless efforts were crucial in making this journal a reality. Mohammad Reza Hejazi and Hossein Kamaly made very useful suggestions which have greatly improved the quality of this issue. Sarah Franzen meticulously copy-edited a draft of this issue; her hard work has immensely improved the final product as well. Finally, I thank Abbas Mirakhor and Ali Agah for their help and support throughout this process.

Once again, we welcome readers and contributors to the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SHĪ'Ī STUDIES. The editors welcome your suggestions for improvement, and we ask Allah's help in making it a success.

Idris Samawi Hamid

ARTICLES

The Problem Of Suffering In Islām[1]

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

INTRODUCTION

Mankind, from time immemorial, has been wrestling with the problem of suffering. Men and women through the ages have sought answers to this problem through myth and ritual, art and philosophy, religious piety and mysticism. It may be safely said that religious traditions have been, in part, attempts to answer the question of human suffering and to find meaning and purpose in life in spite of it.

The present essay will presuppose that suffering—physical, psychological, and spiritual—is our most common existential reality. Thus, in attempting to examine the ways in which Islām has dealt with this reality, and the answers it has provided to the meaning of human existence, we recognize the problems to be universally relevant. Furthermore, it is hoped that the answers we shall propose, while remaining Islāmic in context and intent, will have

[1] *Editor's note:* An earlier version of this article appeared in *Alserāt* 3 2–4, 1982. The author uses Arberry's translation of the Qur'ān (Arberry 1963) for Qur'ānic references.

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relevance for readers outside the Muslim community as well as for those within it. Our concern will not be with right or wrong answers, but with apprehending the truth of our existence.

We shall deal with the problem of suffering and evil in Islām under the following four headings: Islām and the human condition; the problem of suffering in the Qur'ān; the problem of suffering in the *ḥadīṯ*; and the Shī'ī ethos, suffering, and redemption. We shall examine the way in which Islām envisages the human condition both in terms of its ephemerality and limitations, and its infinite possibilities as the instrument of the Divine activity and Will in creation. In this context we shall contrast the Qur'ānic view of the world and man with the weltanschauung of the pre-Islāmic Arabs whom the Qur'ān addresses. This remains crucial to the Islāmic understanding of human suffering, even though later developments have often distorted the Qur'ānic view through theological exaggeration or understatement. Later theological and philosophical formulations of the problem of suffering and evil within the context of Divine justice and predestination on the one hand, and human freedom and responsibility on the other are beyond the scope and purpose of this study. Such developments, however, are clearly indicated in the *ḥadīṯ* literature, much of which was compiled to provide the basis for the various positions taken on this issue. We shall limit our discussion to the two most important ways in which *ḥadīṯ* tradition has dealt with the problem of suffering and evil. These are Divine predestination and human patience in the face of adversity and affliction. Our interest throughout will be more in Islāmic piety rather than in speculation on questions of theodicy or *theology* (*kalām*).

Islām is not, any more than any other religious tradition, a monolithic system of religious thought and piety. Many and varied were the answers which Islām gave to the problems with which we are concerned. Shī'ī Muslims, for various social, political, and religious reasons, have wrestled with the problems of evil and suffering more intensely than any other group.

ISLĀM AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

Man, according to the Qur'ān, is the *vicegerent* (*khalifaẗ*) of God on earth (Q 2:30). It may be further argued that on the scale of being, man is higher than the angels. He is the crown of creation, and potentially at least, he is the closest being to the Divine. This potentiality has been actualized throughout human history in the prophets, who are the Elect of God, and His Friends. In Islām Adam is not the first sinner but the first prophet. He is the *pure one* (*ṣafwaẗ*) of God and the first recipient of His revelation. Islām further insists that every human being is created, like Adam before he sinned, sound and pure. This state of purity is called in the Qur'ān "*fiṭraẗu Āllāh*" and is not subject to change (Q 30:30).

In Islām, as in other monotheistic traditions, man is regarded as a worker with and on behalf of God. The drama of creation and history is, therefore, a Divine-human drama. While humanity was yet in the *world of essences* (*'ālamu ẗal-ḏarr*)[2], He sealed His covenant with them by addressing to them the question, "Am I not your Lord?" The human answer, likewise, signified the acceptance of this covenant

[2] "*Ālamu ẗal-ḏarr*" could mean "world of essences", or "atoms", the connotation in either case being "before man obtained concrete existence".

in the words, *Yes, we testify* (Q 7:172). History is, then, the echo of this Divine address and our answer to it.

God, the Qur'ān tells us, fashioned man with His own two hands (Q 38:75). Then he commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (Q 7:11). This, however, is only one side, the positive side, of the human condition. There is the other dimension of man, the dimension of rebellion, corruption, and violence. When God declared to the angels His intention to make a vicegerent on the earth, they protested, *What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?* (Q 2:30). God's retort was not to demonstrate any innate goodness of man, but rather His own direct intervention by teaching Adam *all the names* (Q 2:31), that is, to initiate human history, which in Islām is the history of revelation and man's response to it.

Sin in Islām is disobedience, which is tantamount to breaking the covenant with God. Yet here again, when Adam did disobey his Lord, God turned towards him through a new act of revelation: *Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned towards him...* (Q 2:37). Sin, therefore, is not an irremediable state; rather, man is subject to error as well as capable of repentance. God is both just and forgiving. One may say that there is no cosmic evil in Islām. Human evil is disobedience, or a hardening of the heart, the *denial* (*kufr*) of what man knows to be the truth[3].

God's absolute sovereignty cannot admit of evil in the cosmic sense. *Satan* (*Iblīs*), by refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, committed the sin of pride not against God,

[3] For the use of 'kufr' in the Qur'ān, see (1966).

but against man. He protested, ***I am better than he; Thou createdst me of fire, and him Thou createdst of clay*** (Q 7:12). Yet even the sin of Iblīs is shown to be part of the Divine scheme of things. God gave him a respite until a fixed day (Q 38:78–81). We must therefore agree with John Bowker that, "... (t)here is duality but no dualism..." in Islām (Bowker 1970, p. 119).

Islām rests on two basic principles; God's *oneness* or *uniqueness* (*tawḥīd*), and man's assent to this truth and his *commitment* (*islām*) to its implications. Because God is One in the absolute sense, He is absolutely omnipotent, having absolute sovereignty over all things. Thus all things in creation are subject to this Divine sovereignty; they are within the universal *islām* (*submission*) to God. Man alone has the choice to freely accept or reject the *grave charge* (*amanaẗ*), which is active Islām (Q 33:72). Yes, the Qur'ān does not tell us what that great charge is which neither the Earth nor the Heavens could bear, but which man foolishly accepted. If, however, this verse is read in the same context as that of the *covenant* (*mīṯāq*) already cited, the meaning is clear. The *amanaẗ* is accepting the implications of the *assent* (*tasdīq*) to the Oneness of God. In the *šahādaẗ* (*profession of faith*), this becomes *islām* in the highest sense.

We can go a step further and assert that in the ultimate sense, man also is part of the *islām* of creation, being himself a creature of God. Man's freedom and responsibility, therefore, must be limited by God's sovereignty and omniscience. This is not to deny human freedom, but to see it within the context of Divine mercy and justice. This idea will become clearer as we briefly contrast the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung with that of pre-Islāmic Arab society.

God was, for the pre-Islāmic Arabs, the creator, the bestower of life. However, once man had come into existence, he fell under the tyrannical sway of *Time* (*al-dahr*). Time was regarded as a blind force, merciless and unsparing in its indiscriminate attacks on the rich and poor and old and young alike. One could never know what time had in store for man. Arab poets often sounded the familiar note of desperate fear of the *vicissitudes* (*ṣurūf*) of *Time* (*al-dahr*). The Qur'ān cites the Arabs of Muhammad's time as saying, ***There is nothing but our present life; we die, and we live, and nothing but Time destroys us*** (Q 45:24)[4].

The phenomenal individuality and sense of freedom which characterize the Arabs of *Jāhiliyyat*[5] extended to the refusal of any conscious authority over the individual's life, including the authority of God. Time was regarded as blind fate determining beforehand man's fortune or misfortune (Q 3:78–81), and even his span of life. The idea of the Divine sovereign Will must have been known, if not accepted, by the Arabs of the Prophet's time. The Qur'ān, therefore, rebukes the Arabs not so much for their lack of belief but for their *kufr*, that is, *denying* what they know to be true. The Qur'ān further contrasts what it regards as the proper attitude of man before God—an attitude of creatureliness or humility—with the haughty attitude of the unbelievers. Theirs was an attitude of arrogance and self-sufficiency.

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[4] See Izutsu (1964, p 123ff).

[5] *Editor's Note:* The expression '*jāhiliyyat*' is used to refer to the condition of *ignorance* and *darkness* to which man is subject in the absence of Islām, particularly the period before the establishment of the Islāmic society by the Prophet.

For the Qur'ānic Weltanschauung, Divine sovereignty made all the difference in the life of the individual as well as society. This is because the Divine sovereign Will was not a capricious Will. God is just and merciful; He hears and answers prayers and has determined everything according to His eternal wisdom (Q 3:191; 67:1–4)[6].

For the pre-Islāmic Arabs, however, any religious beliefs or rituals were formalities, traditions handed down from fathers to sons. While the traditions had to be observed, they did not have to be taken seriously[7]. The result was sure to be a pessimistic outlook on life and disregard of any moral imperatives beyond those imposed by social custom and tradition. Islām, in contrast, underlined the importance of *trust* (*tawakkul*) in God and the regulation of human conduct by the moral imperatives which are imposed by God Himself in the Qur'ān, His immutable Word.

The Qur'ān may be regarded as a long hymn of praise to God, the creator of all things, sovereign Lord over all His creation, the God of mercy and compassion but also of stern judgement. The urgency of the Divine presence in human affairs is, finally, what distinguishes the *Jāhiliyyat* world-view from that of the Qur'ān. The ancient Arabs accepted suffering with bitter resignation, if only because there was no conscious personality behind events and things. Likewise, they accepted pleasure with avarice at the hands of the same blind, impersonal fate to which no gratitude could be shown and no complaint made.

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[6] See also Izutsu (1964, p 125ff).

[7] Of course, an exception to this was the small circle of the *Ḥanīfs*, religious men about whom little is known, and even less about their influence on their society. See Izutsu (1964, p 112–119).

The Qur'ān insists on God's majesty and creative power, His providence and mercy. This is expressed in a series of magnificent verses, each beginning with a question concerning God's majesty and ending with a challenge to human unbelief, ignorance, and lack of reflection:

> *What, is God better, or that they associate? He who created the heavens and earth, and sent down for you out of heaven water; and We caused to grow therewith gardens full of loveliness whose trees you could never grow. Is there a god with God? Nay, but they are a people who assign to Him equals! He who made the earth a fixed place 14 and set it amidst rivers and appointed for it firm mountains and placed a partition between the two seas Is there a god with God? Nay, but the most of them have no knowledge.* [27:59–61]

God's mercy is one with His power to answer ... *the constrained when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil...* (Q 27:62). Likewise, it is God who made men His vicegerents in the earth. *Little indeed do you remember* (Q 27:62).

Here the challenge to Job and his friends is repeated, but in a significantly different way. God does not, as with Job, challenge man to do the great things He is capable of doing (JOB 38–42), but challenges man to contest His power: *Produce your proof, if you speak truly* (Q 27:62). Thus, in the Qur'ānic view, nothing in creation is fortuitous. How then does the Qur'ān account for human evil and suffering?

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE QUR'ĀN

The Qur'ān begins with the fact of suffering and tries not to explain it away, but to explain it in the context of Divine sovereignty, justice, and mercy on the one hand, and human responsibility and relative freedom on the other. The absolute sovereignty of God is essential to the Qur'ānic world-view. Without it, human life and existence are altogether meaningless. The alternatives would be, first, to attribute all good and evil in the world to a blind force; that, as we saw in the case of the pre-Islāmic Arabs, would lead to deep pessimism and irresponsibility. The second alternative would be to limit God's sovereignty by human freedom and the power of evil in man and the world, as is the case in some respects with Christianity[8]. This also the Qur'ān rejects and with a vehemence that often verges on Divine caprice: ***And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers*** (Q 3:54).

We noted above that man is God's representative on earth. We noted further that man is not innately sinful, but is capable of good and evil acts. To provide a constant reminder to man of his primordial covenant with God, God ***sent His guidance*** (Q 20:120–122) so that man would not say in the end he did not know. We must at this point somewhat qualify our position with reference to God's sovereignty. With regard to creation, God's sovereignty is absolute, totally independent of all external factors. With regard to man, however, God's sovereignty is related to, but not limited by, human acts. God has the power to punish, yes, but he punishes the evil-doers. Here, God's justice is

[8] Of course, the matter is far more complicated than here suggested. Yet, theories of redemption are, in our view, attempts at explaining how God was finally able to overcome the devil. See Herbert (1931).

one with His power. God grants mercy, but to those who do good and are themselves merciful. An outstanding example of this is the words addressed to the Prophet: *Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee... thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied* (Q 93:3, 5). After recounting the various acts of mercy towards the Prophet, God concludes, *As for the orphan, do not oppress him, and as for the beggar, scold him not, and as for thy Lord's blessing, declare it* (Q 93:9–11).

In what appear at first sight to be glaring contradictions, the Qur'ān in many verses asserts that God decrees all good and evil for men, and also that men earn all that befalls them by their own actions. Thus we read, *No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before We create it; that is easy for God...* (Q 57:22). Again we read, *Whatever affliction may visit you is for what your own hands have earned...* (Q 41:30). The contradiction is resolved if we take both statements in their wider context. Hence, when we are told that God has already prescribed all that befalls us in a Book, this is so that we may not despair in the face of adversity or boast with ease and prosperity, since ... *God loves not any man proud and boastful...* (Q 57:23). Similarly, the verse stating that we suer the evil we earn concludes, ... *and He pardons much* (Q 42:30). We act within the limit of God's sovereign will, yet the evil we earn is our own doing. God's mercy, moreover, is not limited by our evil will, as His sovereignty is limited neither by the good nor by the evil we do.

From God comes guidance, and to Him belong both this world and the next (Q 92:12–13). Yet at the risk of overstating the point, we must add that God voluntarily, so to speak, limits His sovereignty by our actions. To be

sure, He guides whom He pleases and leads astray whom He pleases (Q 14:4), but also He wills no injustice to His servants (Q 3:182). This point is succinctly stated in the Qur'ān in the words, ... ***and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it*** (Q 99:7–8).

In general, the Qur'ān asserts that God works with our capacities or tendencies for good or evil. He it is who inspires the soul with both its lewdness and piety, or fear of God, and He it is who has guided man on ***the two highways*** (Q 91:7).

Like other monotheistic religious traditions, Islām is intensely historical. History is the state of Divine activity where God's omnipotence, omniscience, and justice operate. The Qur'ān is replete with examples of God's just punishment of peoples of old for their unbelief, hardheartedness, and contumacy. We read of towns that were destroyed because their peoples were heedless of God's messengers. Such tales conclude with the words ***And We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves*** (Q 11:100-101). History is God's court of justice and the instrument of His discipline.

It may be argued that even in the strict justice of God, His mercy is manifested. The examples of the severe punishments of bygone generations must serve as lessons for those who follow, so that they may be spared the fate of their predecessors. God's justice, however, does not operate in frustration or capricious wrath. It is corrective, not retributive. He forgives those who repent. If men persist in their heedlessness and obstinacy until death comes upon them, for these, God has prepared a painful doom (Q 4:17–18).

For the man of faith, the old question of undeserved suffering is the real test. If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, just and merciful, why does He allow innocent people to suffer and the wicked to prosper? Several answers to this question are suggested in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is not interested in theodicy, but in human attitudes or responses to God's acts in nature and history. The Qur'ān is not interested in logic and justification, but in the dynamic relationship between man and God. It is for this reason that no single answer can be given to the problem of evil and suffering in human society.

The most obvious answer is that suffering is sometimes a test of faith. As this answer relates directly to man's trust in God's omnipotence and omniscience, His justice, mercy, and love, the Qur'ān returns to it again and again in various contexts and themes. The Qur'ān insists that in the face of affliction and sorrow man must remember that, ... ***Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return***... (Q 2:156). These words are constantly on the lips of pious Muslims in the presence of calamity or death. Such an affirmation of faith provides a hard test to man's resilience and trust. ***Surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient***... (Q 2:158).

In view of the Qur'ān, one of the essential distinctions between God the creator and His creatures is the fact that ***All things shall perish, save His face*** (Q 28:88: 55:26–27). Death is the final test, but a test that every living creature must undergo. Thus God's eternity and omnipotence are set in sharp contrast with our ephemerality. ***Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, though you should be in raised-up***

towers (Q 4:78). Yet even this unquestionable fact is invoked against man's tendency to self-righteousness in blaming the calamity of an individual on others or in regarding it as just punishment of the individual's sin. In the verse just sited, it was Muhammad who was blamed for the death of martyrs in battle. In answer, he is commanded to say, ... *everything is from God* (Q 4:78). Men should not seek reasons for the misfortunes of others, or deride them for their disabilities (Q 24:61).

Another justification that the Qur'ān offers for the trial of faith through suffering is that suffering creates true humility. The other side of humility is not only pride, but despair. Men wax proud in times of ease and prosperity for which they claim credit and despair when misfortune befalls them, blaming it on God (Q 11:9–10).

In all the cases just cited, human response is of crucial importance. What should then be man's proper response to the trials of suffering, misfortune, and sorrow? The answer to this question has already been partially suggested. In the face of adversity man must be patient and humble. The fact that God's sovereignty is over all things should inspire not a fatalistic attitude towards life or a resigned acceptance of the ills of society. That would mean man's shirking of his responsibility as the vicegerent of God on earth. It would also mean despair, which is the denial of God's mercy, and that is a great blasphemy.

Patience at all times and gratitude for everything should not mean inactivity and detachment from this world, but a humble acceptance of God's will and the dynamic hope and trust in God's mercy. "Thy will be done" must be the response of faith in humility and confidence in God's mercy, His "dominion, power, and glory." Both human responsibility and trust, and God's mercy and sovereign

control are asserted in the words, ***God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited*** (Q 2:186). Yet even so, man is not left to struggle alone. God Himself prays on our behalf. Both in the Lord's prayer and the prayers of the first surah of the Qur'ān and the end of the second, we pray not only to God, but with God for His mercy: ***Our Lord, do not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear. And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our protector*** (Q 2:186). Indeed, in every invocation of the name of God, the merciful and compassionate, a prayer of affirmation of faith and trust is uttered. God is nearer to men than their life pulse (Q 50:16), ready to hear and succor those who call upon Him and respond to His call (Q 2:186). The answer to the despair of sin and evil is repentance and trust in God's mercy and forgiveness:

> ***And when those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, "Peace be upon you. Your Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy. Whosoever of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and makes amends. He is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.*** [6:54]

Suffering, patiently endured in the way of God, will have its reward, if not in this life, certainly in the hereafter. It is man's way of expiating his sins and evil deeds. It is an affirmation of man's faith in God, of preferring Him to everything else. It is an affirmation of God's *Oneness* (*tawḥīd*) in man's life. *Jihad* (*holy struggle*), while it includes the so-called "holy war", goes far beyond it. It is all that man endures of hardship, suffering, and evil for

the sake of God and the good[9]. Through hardship, suffering and martyrdom in the way of God, man's wealth and life are offered to God as the price of the bliss of Paradise (Q 2:207). Indeed, martyrdom is declared to be the bridge connecting this ephemeral life to the eternal life with God. Thus we read, *Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided...* (Q 2:154). It is not that a person should seek death that he may be a martyr, but to struggle in the way of God; and whether he is slain or victorious, the reward is the same. *So let them fight in the way of God, who sell the present life for the world to come; and whosoever fights in the way of God and is slain, or conquers. We shall bring him a mighty wage* (Q 4:74).

The Qur'ān, as has already been observed, is not a treatise on theodicy, but a book of guidance for men to a life of piety and righteousness. The life it enjoins is a life of personal *commitment* (*islām*) to God's Will, and a living of this commitment in social responsibility; it is a dynamic life of faith and works. The Qur'ān is a Divine call to the good addressed to those "who have faith and do good deeds" (as the Qur'ān so frequently says). An integral part of this life of faith is the individual's responsibility towards the unfortunate in society; the destitute, orphans, wayfarers and those oppressed in slavery:

> *It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God and the Last Day, the angels,*

---

9 For example, *hijrat* (*leaving one's home for the sake of God*) is a form of jihad (Q 22:58–60).

> ***the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms. And they who fulfil their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly God-fearing.*** [2:177]

Man's primary responsibility, as God's representative on earth, is to cooperate with God in building the Good Society, to establish the kingdom of God on earth. That Muslims, like the rest of humanity, have fallen short of this ideal cannot be denied. Nonetheless, the ideal remains as a challenge and a responsibility for the man of faith. It is his highest goal, and though he may never fully attain it, still he must strive for its attainment. In its transcendent aspect, it is the true Islām, the immutable Divine Will for creation. In its human aspect, this goal embodies the hope of humanity for a better existence and the religious obligations of the man of faith to do good. That this may not be left only to man's discretion, the Qur'ān makes it one of the pillars of faith in the *religious duty* (*farḍ*), *zakāt̃* (*almsgiving*). '*Zakāt̃*' literally means "purity", that is, "to purify oneself through giving". It is a form of *worship* (*'ibādat̃*) of God both as a religious duty and as a good deed. ***Prosperous is he who has cleansed himself, and mentions the Name of his Lord, and prays*** (Q 87:14–15).

With such a positive and fully involved attitude towards life, the Qur'ān can hardly be accused of fatalism. Those

kinds of suffering over which man has no control must be endured and accepted as coming from God. They must serve as a source of humility and discipline. In the end, God will reward the sufferer with the eternal bliss of Paradise. The Qur'ān regards this world as a passing vanity (Q 3:185). Both its pains and its pleasures are ephemeral. Thus the Qur'ān chides people, *Nay, but you prefer the present life; and the world to come is better, and more enduring* (Q 87:16–17).

With regard to human suffering and responsibility, the Qur'ān is one with the Old and New Testaments. The prophets stressed God's demand for justice and compassion; they saw suffering as the instrument of Divine discipline and instruction. The Gospels, likewise, insist on man's involvement with the problems of society. This involvement, moreover, is regarded as essential for salvation. The poor and afflicted Lazarus will reap the rewards of his sufferings in heaven, "in the bosom of Abraham," while the rich man who did not share his wealth will meet his just punishment in the fiery pit (LUKE 16:19ff). The same idea is presented even more dramatically and with greater urgency in the apocalypse of Matthew's Gospel (MATTHEW 25:31ff). There the good people, the "sheep" who shall inherit the kingdom, are those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick. By doing this to others, it was as though they did it to Christ, the redeemer and judge of humanity. Similarly, those who do good deeds are, according to the Qur'ān, giving God a *goodly loan* (Q 2:245; 5:12; 52:11).

Evil happens in the world, not in spite of the Divine Will, but because God allows it to happen. Satan, as we have seen, was given a respite for a time, *... to a fixed day* (Q 15:37–38). Similarly, the wicked have a respite; it

may be until the day of the final reckoning, when every soul ... *shall know its works, the former and the latter* (Q 82:5).

God is the creator of all things including, in the final analysis, Man's weal and woe. Yet, even in this, man is to some extent the Divine instrument of creation. This paradox of God's absolute sovereignty and final responsibility for all things, and man's freedom, is essential to the faith in One God. Christ, the redeemer and judge, will admit the good to the kingdom which was prepared for them before the foundations of the world, and the wicked into the fire which was preordained (MATTHEW 25:41, 46). Thus Calvin's predestinarian theory has its biblical basis, as much as the one-sided insistence of Muslim theologians on Divine predestination has its basis in the Qur'ān. Again, Bowker (1970, p. 116) is right in asserting that, "... a fatalistic and indifferent attitude to the occurrence of suffering is ruled out by the Qur'ān itself." That this attitude has long dominated popular piety as well as theological thinking is due, we believe, to the socio-political and economic vicissitudes of the history of Muslim society, and not to the message of the Qur'ān. It is "... a perversion of Islām, not its true expression, and the Qur'ān militates against such an attitude" (Bowker 1970, p. 116).

The attitude which the Qur'ān enjoins is one of submission to God, the God whose mercy ... *has encompassed all things* (Q 7:156), whose face is before us ... *wherever we return our faces* (Q 2:115). The prayer of faith which the Qur'ān teaches is *Say: 'My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying—all belongs to God, the Lord of all Being* (Q 6:163).

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE ḤADĪṮ

The Qur'ān, as we have seen, moves between Divine determinism and human freedom, and Divine preordination and human effort and responsibility. While it asserts them both in different contexts, it does not take an extreme position on either approach. In general, absolute Divine sovereignty and foreordination of all things were, from the beginning of Islāmic speculation on the subject, favored above all other alternatives. Much support for this position was found in the *ḥadīṯ* (pl. *aḥādīṯ*).

All Islāmic literature subsequent to the Qur'ān may be regarded in some sense as an attempt to understand the sacred text and fulfil its injunctions in the daily life of the community. The *ḥadīṯ*, as the words of the Prophet, must be taken as the best and primary commentary on the Qur'ān. It seeks not to contradict the Divine word, but to amplify its meaning. Thus, while the *ḥadīṯ* on the whole asserts Divine determinism over human freedom and effort, it tempers that position by asserting the expiatory role of suffering and its purgative effect on the life of the man of faith. Here again, it is patience in affliction that is regarded as the highest virtue in the believer and the test of his faith.

Aḥādīṯ dealing with Divine predestination are not involved specifically with the problem of human suffering. They are, rather, concerned with man's character and destiny, his lot in this world, and his blessedness or damnation in the next. We shall analyze only those which are based directly on the word of the Qur'ān.

We saw in our discussion of the covenant verse (Q 7:172) that God sealed His primordial covenant with humanity through the revelation of His Lordship and man's acceptance of this challenge. In some *aḥādīṯ*, the import of

this verse is reversed. Thus it is reported on the authority of 'Umar, the second Caliph, that the Apostle of God was asked concerning the meaning of this verse and he said:

> *God, blessed and exalted be He, created Adam, then passing His right hand over Adam's back. He took out some of his progeny, "These I have created for Paradise, and they will perform the deeds of the people of Paradise." Again God passed His right hand over Adam's back and took out another portion of his progeny and said, "These I have created for the fire, and they shall perform the deeds of the people of the fire." A man asked the Prophet, "What then is the purpose of human action?" The Prophet answered, "When God creates a servant for Paradise, He causes him to do the works of the people of Paradise so that the servant would die performing their deeds; and God would therefore cause him to enter Paradise. Similarly, the one destined for the fire will likewise be caused to do the works of the people of the fire, and thus enter the fire.*

According to this, human action loses all meaning, since God has predetermined all things including man's good and evil acts. Hence, God's self-revelation is not a challenge for men to be vigilant in fulfilling the Divine covenant, but a revelation of the Lord's absolute power over the destiny of His servants.

In a similar tradition, the Prophet is said to have declared to a group of people at a funeral, *... there is no soul endowed with breath except that God has determined its place in Paradise or in the fire, and that it was prescribed either as* miserable *[*i.e., *damned]* or happy *[*i.e.,

blessed]. A man protested, "O Apostle of God, should we not then abide by our book [i.e., Divine decree] and abandon action?" The Prophet replied, *Act, for everything is facilitated [*by God*].* The *ḥadīṯ* goes on to assert that those destined for happiness will be aided in performing right actions, and those destined for misery will be aided to act accordingly. The Prophet then quoted,

> *As for him who gives and is God-fearing and confirms the reward most fair. We shall surely ease him to the Easing. But as for him who is a miser and self-sufficient, and cries lies to the reward most fair. We shall surely ease him to the Hardship...*

The verses quoted in support of the argument of this *ḥadīṯ* do not argue for Divine predestination. On the contrary, they provide a good example of the dynamic relationship between God and man as envisaged by the Qur'ān. God's assistance to man for good or evil depends on man's involvement in the actual life of society, involvement with its poor and needy.

Not only is the fate of humanity collectively determined, but the fate of every individual is also fixed in the womb. The traditions describing the manner in which the fate of the unborn child is sealed go into graphic details. One example should suffice:

Forty or forty-five nights after conception, an angel comes to the womb to blow the spirit into the yet unformed foetus. The angel asks God, "O Lord, is it to be a happy or a miserable one?" and that is recorded. The angel asks again, "O Lord, is it to be a male or a female?" and that is recorded. The angel then records the actions, character, the *term of life* (*ajal*) and allotted sustenance of the unborn

child. The Prophet concludes, *After that the scrolls are sealed, and nothing will be added or deleted therefrom.* In another version of the same *ḥadīṯ* the Prophet adds, *By God... a person may perform the deeds of the people of Paradise until there is no more than a cubit's length between him and Paradise, but then the* book *(decree) overtakes him and he performs the works of the people of the fire; thus he would enter it.* Likewise a man who lives-all his life doing evil until the decree overtakes him would repent and thus enter Paradise.

Although the traditions just discussed do not deal directly with the problem of suffering, it is to be understood that all is from God, the evil and the good. God decrees not only man's capacity to act, but also the acts themselves. The God of such traditions, however, is not the God of mercy and love, the God whom man can love and worship. Furthermore, according to such traditions neither good nor evil has meaning or purpose which man can fathom. They provide no grounds for hope to balance the fear man must feel in the face of the Divine inscrutability.

The hard line which these traditions represent was from the beginning challenged by other traditions. These traditions concerned themselves not only with the meaning and purpose of suffering in human life, but with the actual suffering of God's servants and His love and compassion for them. The traditions we are about to consider breathe the warm pietistic air of the Qur'ān and generally echo its dynamic view of the Divine-human relationship. Suffering is a test of the faith of the believer. If it is endured patiently and with trust and gratitude, it evokes God's love and compassion. It serves as an expiation for the sins of the sufferer who will be well rewarded for the strength of his faith. Thus it is reported that Abū Waqqāʿ, a well-known

Companion, asked the Prophet, "O Apostle of God, who among men are visited with the greatest affliction?" The Prophet said, *The Prophets, then the pious, then those like them among men. A man is visited with affliction in accordance with his* faith (dīn). *If his faith is durable, his affliction is increased, but if his faith is weak, then his affliction is lightened accordingly.* The Prophet continued, *Calamity continues to afflict the servant until he walks on the face of the earth without any sin cleaving to him.*

Suffering can be a sign of the love of God for His patient servant. For if God loves a people, we are told, *... he visits them with affliction....* This view of suffering has profoundly affected Islāmic piety through the life and teachings of the mystics of Islām. To them God spoke directly, not only in the Qur'ān, but in *aḥādīṯ qudsiyyaẗ* (*sacred* or *divine utterances transmitted by the Prophet*; s. '*ḥadīṯ qudsī*'). The view presented in these traditions is that God allows His faithful servant to suffer in order that he may be rewarded for his patience and trust. Yet God himself sympathetically shares, so to speak, the pain of His suffering servant. If a man bears patiently and with fortitude the loss of a loved one, God will reward him with Paradise. In the *ḥadīṯ qudsī* to the effect that God's love and mercy overshadow His justice and wrath, He shares the sorrow of His servant in spite of His unalterable decree. Thus the Prophet said, *When the child of a servant dies, God, blessed and majestic is He, says to His angels, "Have you taken the soul of my servant's child?" "Yes," they would answer. God repeats the question three times to indicate His compassion for the pious sufferer. Then He asks, "What did my servant say?" They answer, "He praised you and repeated, 'Surely we belong to God and to Him we return.'"*

Then God commands, "Build a mansion for My servant in Paradise and call it the House of Praise."

No doubt under Sūfī influence, some of the pious began to despise prosperity and health and wish for poverty and affliction. They may quote the example of a pious Companion who was afflicted with paralysis. When asked why he did not seek medical help, he replied, "I almost did. But I remembered the people of ʿĀd and Ṯamūd... and many other peoples. There were among them afflicted people and physicians. Yet neither those needing cure nor those offering it remained; they all perished." Such extreme attitudes, however, were again tempered as men were taught to repeat a prayer attributed to the ancient Prophet David, "O my Lord! Not a disease that would destroy me, nor health that would make me forget, but a state between the two."

THE SHĪʿĪ ETHOS: SUFFERING AND REDEMPTION

We insisted earlier in this discussion that what determines the world-view of a religious tradition is not only the concept of the divine, but the view of man which such a tradition holds as well. We wish to add here that this is true also with regard to the different expressions or emphasis within any one given religious tradition. Shīʿī and Sunnī Islām, therefore, differ principally not on any basic Islāmic beliefs or obligations, but rather on the question of authority, both temporal and spiritual, in the community, and the community's response to God's involvement in human history.

Islām views human history essentially as the history of Divine guidance through revelation and the human response to this divine initiative. Shīʿī Islām carries this view to its ultimate conclusion. The human potential, it

asserts, must always be fully actualized and exemplified in special human beings who stand midway between humanity and the Divine. These are the Twelve Imāms, the first of God's creation and His proof against humanity. Before all things, the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimaẗ, ʿAlī (the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law), and their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were manifestations of Divine light. The process of their creation is described by the Sixth Imām as follows:

> *God created us from the light of His majesty. Then He formed us from a lump of clay preserved and well guarded under His Throne. He then made the light to dwell in the clay, thus we became luminous humans...*

As human archetypes, the Imāms are the concrete embodiment of the Divine Word. They are, so to speak, the speaking Qurʾān, as they alone among men comprehend its hidden meaning. The Imāms are the repositories of *Divine Knowledge* (*ʿilm*) and the interpreters of God's *revelation* (*waḥy*). They are the incontrovertible *proofs of God* (*ḥujaj*) over all creation. Through them alone is God truly worshipped. *Had it not been for us*, the eighth Imām al-Riḍā declared, *God would not have been worshipped.*

The Imāms are not only the Divine proof or judgement against human folly, they are also the source of *Divine grace* (*lutf*) and forgiveness. Their names were the **words** which Adam received from his Lord (Q 2:37), so He forgave him. They are the *pillars* (*arkān*) of the earth, and on them depends cosmic order, the regularity of nature, and mankind's sustenance.

Shī'ī Imāmology is, in some way, analogous to Christology. The Prophet and his descendants, the Imāms, collectively play a role similar to that of Christ in Christianity. Like Christ the Logos, they are eternally present with God[10]. Through them all things were created, and on their existence depends the existence of the entire creation. Like Christ, moreover, the Imāms were destined to suffer persecution and martyrdom. Their sufferings are a source of redemption for those who accept their absolute authority, and a source of judgement for their opponents. Like Christ, finally, the Imāms will be vindicated on the Day of Judgement. The Twelfth Imām, the Mahdī, will come to judge mankind and usher in an era of peace, comfort, and prosperity on the earth. He shall purify the

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[10] *Editors Note:* Of course in *Athanasian* Pauline Christology, which is followed by the overwhelming majority of Christian churches, the Logos is an *uncreated* part of Godhead, whereas in Tashayyu' the Logos is very much a *creation* that is eternally utterly dependent on its Creator. The Logos is not eternally present in the Essence of God, but is eternally present with respect to the rest of creation that is created *through* the Logos. This Shī'ī concept of Logos is expressed most eloquently in the *Supplication for the Month of Rajab*, narrated on the authority of the Twelfth Imām:

...وَ مَقَامَاتِكَ ٱلَّتِي لَا تَعطِيلَ لَهَا فِي كُلِّ مَكَانٍ، بِمَعرِفَتِكَ بِهَا مَن عَرَفَكَ. لَا فَرقَ بَينَكَ وَ بَينَهَا إِلَّا أَنَّهُم عِبَادُكَ وَ خَلقُكَ، فَتقُهَا وَ رَتقُهَا بِيَدِكَ، بَدؤُهَا مِنكَ، وَ عَودُهَا إِلَيكَ.

...And by Your Stations for which there is no divesting of them in any place. Whoever has cognizance of You has cognizance of You through them. There is no difference between You and them except that they are Your servants and Your creation. The rending of them and sewing them up is in Your hands. Their genesis is from You; their returning is to You...

earth from iniquity and wrong-doing. In this mission, the Mahdī will be aided by Christ himself who awaits in heaven his return, as do men here on earth.

The basis of the Shī'ī ethos of suffering and martyrdom is the tragic death of Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet and Third Imām of the Shī'ī community. Ḥusayn's death has been regarded by the general community of Muslims as the tragedy of Islām. It has therefore served as a source of sorrow and a lesson of true sacrifice in the way of God and the Truth. It has also served as an example for the pious to imitate in their struggle against wrong-doing and tyranny. For Shī'ī Muslims, the death of Ḥusayn is a cosmic event, the focal point of human history.

Shī'ī piety has viewed human history prior to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn as a series of events foreshadowing and, in some instances, foretelling this tragic event. Prophets from Adam to Muhammad were told of it, and in some way shared in the grief of the martyred Imām and his family. The Prophet Muhammad was told of the impending death of his grandson by multitudes of angels who came to express their joy at the birth of the Imām, and offer their condolences for his impending painful martyrdom.

Shī'ī hagiography has painted pathetic scenes of the sorrow of the Prophet and his family as they recalled the fate that was to befall their beloved child. They lived in a house of sorrows, and the mistress of that house was Fāṭimat *al-Zahrā'* (*the Radiant*). Her short life was a tragedy. As an infant she was orphaned by the death of her mother. As a married woman, she and her husband and two sons lived in poverty and privation. Then the death of her father left her totally distraught with grief. After him, she suffered persecution and humiliation. She mourned her father until she died less than six months after his death.

In Paradise, she continues to mourn the death of her son Ḥusayn, and all the denizens of heaven and hell share in her grief. Her grief will continue till the Day of Judgement, the day of her final vindication. Both her grief and vindication are graphically described in a popular tradition attributed to the Sixth Imām al-Ṣādiq and paraphrased below:

> On the day of resurrection, Fāṭimaẗ will sit in judgement beneath a dome of light. Her martyred son Ḥusayn will stand before her carrying his head in his hand, ready to contend with his murderers. Seeing him, she will raise a piercing lament, and all prophets, angels and men will weep because of her weeping. God will then transform Ḥusayn into the best of forms before her eyes. His murderers and all those who shared in his blood will be brought together for the final retribution. They will be killed and brought back to life until each of the Imāms will have killed them all. The Imām concluded, *then will all anger be appeased and all sorrow forgotten.*

Redemption must always imply judgement as well as salvation. It is the struggle between good and evil where the good prevails and healing and harmony are restored to mankind. It is a return to the primordial goodness of the world as it emerged from the Creator's hand. Thus both redemption and judgement are an integral part of the monotheistic religious traditions, where God will finally justify all His ways in the eschatological consummation of history. Fāṭimaẗ and the Imāms play the same role in Shī'ī piety that Christ of the apocalypse plays in the early Church. Christ will return to save and judge, to condemn the wicked and vindicate the righteous. In both Shī'ī

and Christian eschatology the bitterness of a persecuted community is all too apparent[11].

The Shīʿī community has identified itself with the Imāms and their sufferings in many ways. One of these is the *memorial services* (*majālisu al-taʿziyat*) which are held during the first ten days of *Muḥarram*, the first month of the Islāmic calendar. In these memorial services, the participants mourn the martyred Imām through ritual, verse, drama, and shedding copious tears. Very early, perhaps shortly after the death of Ḥusayn, his treacherous supporters felt deep remorse that in time came to be expressed in a rich *cultus* which has survived until the present day. Hagiographical tales and legends of the lives of the Imāms and their eschatological role continue to grow and provide a rich source of ideas, myth, and ritual for this devotional cult.

The first ten days of Muḥarram, culminating in *ʿĀšūrā'* (*the tenth of Muḥarram*), may be regarded as the Shīʿī holy week. During these days, pious Shīʿī Muslims share in the sufferings of the Imāms as they seek to internalize these sufferings through the recollection of the tragic events of Muḥarram, which they act out in popular passion plays. The purpose of all this is to induce sorrow in the hearts of the faithful and to bring out their tears.

Weeping for the suffering and death of Ḥusayn, and the harm and persecutions which all the Imāms had suffered[12],

[11] *Editor's note:* Note that a major point of contrast between Imāmology and Christology is that in Christology the suffering of Christ is supposed to have salvific efficacy for whomsoever merely has *faith* in it. On the other hand, in Imāmology the suffering of Imām Ḥusayn presents a *challenge* to the Shīʿah to *participate* in his drama, embrace his suffering as their own, and to achieve salvation and realize the coming of the Mahdī by mirroring and carrying on his mission.

will earn the weeper divine forgiveness and assure him a place in Paradise. In numerous traditions attributed to most of the Imāms, it is asserted that whoever weeps for Ḥusayn and causes others to weep will have rich rewards in Paradise. His sins will be forgiven, even if they were as numerous as the sands of the sea.

No doubt this emphasis on sorrow as the means of salvation for the faithful was meant to keep the spirit of revolt alive. It had other political implications as well, which took on different expressions according to different circumstances. Nonetheless, the emphasis expressed the profound religious view that the community's sharing of the sufferings of its religious heroes here on earth will be the means of its sharing in their bliss in the world to come. The faithful must bear the cross of suffering in this world in order for them to share the fulfilment of the final hope of salvation in the world to come. Traditions expressing this view are usually couched in powerful language and are intended to produce an equally powerful psychological impact on their hearers. The following is a typical example attributed to the Eighth Imām:

> *He who recalls our afflictions and weeps for all we have suffered will be with us in our high station on the day of resurrection. He who is reminded of our sufferings and weeps, and causes others to weep, his 32 eyes shall not weep on the day when many eyes shall weep. He who sits in an assembly wherein our memory is kept alive, his heart will not die on the day when many hearts shall die.*

[12] According to Shī'ī tradition, from at least the beginning of the 3rd century AH, all the Imāms except the Twelfth were martyred, either by the sword or by poison.

Redemption may be a divine gift, but it is a gift that must be earned by both the redeemer and the redeemed. It must be earned by the redeemer through the agony of suffering and death. It must be earned by the community of the redeemed through their endurance of suffering, and even death if necessary. Redemption in Shī'ī Islām is not expressed in the idea of ransom or the ancient ritualistic sacrifice, but through intercession. The martyred Imām earned this prerogative of intercession through frustration, failure, and, finally, the cup of martyrdom. In very early hagiographical interpretations of the death of Ḥusayn, it was insisted that he could not attain his high status with God except through martyrdom. Thus the Imām, and even those who died with him, were predestined for martyrdom as the price of their divine favor.

Not only Shī'ī Muslims, but the Muslim community in general continues to find in the tragedy of Muḥarram a source of comfort and courage in the face of wrong-doing and adversity. On Calvary and on the hot sands of the Mesopotamian desert, in every self-sacrifice for the truth, humanity will find strength and challenge, healing and judgement. Only in this way could suffering have a purpose, as it carries humanity a step closer to God.

CONCLUSION

Genesis tells us that God made man in his own image. Although the Qur'ān does not say the same thing directly, it clearly implies it in its view of man as God's representative on earth, man to whom even the angels had to make obeisance. Islāmic piety, both in the *ḥadīṯ* and mystical discipline, went even further than Genesis in its high claims for man. The human religious quest may be regarded as an attempt at discovering our own image of

God. As our view of ourselves matures, our vision of this divine image grows clearer. This goal must be achieved through our total involvement in life, its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains.

"Why," it may be asked (Bowker 1970, p. 120), "is there not in Islām,... anything like the profound analysis of tragedy and defeat as there is in Judaism and even more in Christianity?" The answer is that in Islām man is not the pathetic fallen creature whom God alone, and through a supreme act of sacrifice, could save. The emphasis on man's power and responsibility as the vicegerent of God must be matched with equal emphasis on divine sovereignty. This the Qur'ān does without sacrificing either man's responsibility or God's omnipotence. In our view, both the Judaeo-Christian and Islāmic interpretations of suffering, different though they may be, are equally valid and necessary for a true and universal understanding of man. The truth is far too great and too profound to be contained in any one religious tradition, philosophy or ideology. Nor is the truth static; it is rather a dynamic force forever challenging and enriching our lives, whatever our understanding of God and man may be.

In Islām, for instance, the "...virile and wide ranging sense of the victory and omnipotence of God..." (Bowker 1970, p. 120), with all the implications this phrase must have for the life of the Muslim community, was not left unchallenged by Shī'ī piety. Tashayyu' can be viewed as a movement of protest. In this lies its great contribution to Muslim piety, in spite of the many excesses of some of its claimants. Moreover, once the political climate calling for such excesses had changed, Shī'ī and Sunnī understanding of the value of suffering as a means of discipline and instruction converged. It is now common for Shī'ī *'ulamā'*

(*religious scholars*) to preach during the commemorations of '*Āšūrā*' that Ḥusayn died in order that wrong-doing, poverty, hunger, and oppression may be exposed. He died in order that the Islāmic ideal may be saved from any attempts to confuse it with mere power or vain glory. On all this, Sunnī Muslims are also agreed. The new understanding of this martyrdom was eloquently expressed through the words put in the mouth of *Ḥusayn the Martyr* by a modern Sunnī Muslim Egyptian writer. We shall conclude this essay with the voice of Ḥusayn from the depths of tragedy across the centuries (Šarqāwī 1969, p. 283–286):

> *Remember me not through the shedding of the blood of others, but remember me when you seek to save the truth from the claws of falsehood. Remember me in your tears; when the meek and lowly are oppressed. Remember me when religion is belied by the cries of hungry stomachs and when the corrupt among you are set up in government over men of faith. Remember me when the singing of nightingales in your lives would be overcome by howls of pain and when the sound of clinging glasses drowns the cries of weepers ... But if you hold your peace against deception and accept humiliation, then I would be slain anew. I would be killed every day a thousand times. I would be killed every time a zealous man is silent and a man of endurance slackens. I would be killed whenever men are subjugated and humiliated... Then would the wound of the martyr forever curse you because you did not avenge the blood of the martyr. Avenge the blood of the martyr.*

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Brief Remarks on Relations between Tashayyuʿ and Christianity

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TEXTUAL EVIDENCES

The history of Tashayyuʿ indicates a relatively old relation with Christianity, one form of which was the religious and verbal dialogue clearly mentioned in Shīʿī texts. Among these dialogues, one may cite the ones that were held between the spiritual leaders of the two sides and were known as debates with the *Jāṭalīq*. The Shīʿī commentators on *aḥādīṯ* have said that the expression '*Jāṭalīq*' refers to the most prominent religious figure in Christianity of a given place and time. Most probably this term is equivalent to the word 'Catholicos'. Muḥammad .b ʿAlī .b Bābawayh Qummī known as Šayḫ Ṣadūq (d. 901 CE) has recorded in his works four debates between the Catholicos and the Shīʿī Imams or their eminent students in theology. Probably the first dialogue occurred between Imam ʿAlī (A) and the Catholicos of his time at about 657 CE. But these dialogues reached their peak in the 2nd centuryAH (8th and early 9th century CE) during the life of Imam Ṣādiq (A) and Imām Riḍā (A), the sixth and eighth imāms of the Shīʿah.

Another matter that shows the interaction between Tashayyuʿ and Christianity is the narration of the work and

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The Grave of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: Different Views About its Specific Location and the Locations of the Graves of Some Other Prophets Buried in it

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ABSTRACT

In this article the status of Amīru āl-Muᵓminīn ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the deed of his assassination are first outlined, along with the common idea that ᶜAlī foresaw his murder, its place, its time, its manner, and even the identity of his murderer. ᶜAlī did nothing to prevent his murder because he believed that his approaching death was his fate and God's will. Hence ᶜAlī tells the news of his death before his actual murder. Next in this article nine places that the historians mention and that are believed to be the location of ᶜAlī's grave are described.

The author gives greater weight to the opinion of the Shīᶜī scholars who hold that ᶜAlī is buried in Najaf, four miles away from Kufa.

Various views are set forth holding that ᶜAlī's grave also contains the remains of the prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Nūḥ. Accordingly, the land of Najaf became a holy land for the Shīᶜīs comparable to the Kaᶜbah. The holiness of Kufa stems from ᶜAlī's holiness, followed by the holiness of the other prophets.

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INTRODUCTION

The early Arab historians are nearly unanimous o manner of ᶜAlī's assassination, the identity of his assa and the motives behind this historic murder. Yet same historians disagree about the location of the gra of this focal personality, who played a decisive role in t establishment of the foundations of Islām at its beginning.

ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib also played a central and leading role in the events of the great schism in the history of Islām, whose effects continued to appear until the emergence of two main parties in Islām, the Sunnīs and the Shīᶜīs. The latter apparently assumed this name because they "sided with" ᶜAlī and his family. They declared their support for him and argued that he was more entitled than any other person to be the caliph of Muḥammad (Ṣ), and that he was the only legitimate successor to the Messenger.

The Shīᶜīs encountered strong opposition because of their views, especially on the part of the *Umayyads* (*Banū Umayyah*). These undertook to resist the Shīᶜīs and to diminish their political and religious role during the first decades of Islām.

For their part, the Shīᶜīs did not remain idle in face of the deeds of their opponents, the Banū Umayyah. The Umayyads sought to obliterate ᶜAlī's role and to deprive him of any legitimate right to the caliphate. The Shīᶜīs counter-claimed that ᶜAlī's right to the caliphate was inscribed in the scrolls of the prophets (ᶜUṭāridī 1993, Vol 1, p. 322).

In fact, the Shīᶜīs were not alone in their praise and love for ᶜAlī; many Sunnīs shared these, and held ᶜAlī's qualities in respect and esteem. For the Sunnīs too ᶜAlī was the Prophet's cousin, his son-in-law, and the fourth caliph.

They also considered him one of the people of "prio and "precedence" because he was among the first to ac Islām and to believe in Muḥammad's message and prophecy.

ᶜALĪ B. ABĪ ṬĀLIB'S ASSASSINATION

After ᶜAlī's bitter conflict with his opponents of Banū Umayyaẖ, headed by Muᶜāwiyaẖ b. Abī Sufyān (d. 680 CE), some left him; others turned against him following the battle of Ṣiffīn (657) and the incident of arbitration. ᶜAlī's power continued to shrink, and he had to withdraw to Kufa helplessly, without influence in the other large Islāmic cities. By contrast, the Umayyads were increasing their power and influence and attracting more supporters in all the other areas of the Islāmic state.

ᶜAlī's attempt to draw the Ḫawārij to his side on the pretext of fighting Muᶜāwiyaẖ and his opponents did not succeed, so they were accused of being disbelievers.[1] He attacked them heavily in the battle of Nahrawān (658) and destroyed them. However, things did not end there. The Ḫawārij continued their hatred and malice against ᶜAlī and Muᶜāwiyaẖ alike, though their ire at ᶜAlī was greater than at Muᶜāwiyaẖ, especially after the battle of Nahrawān (658).

It is probable that ᶜAlī's destruction of the Ḫawārij in Nahrawān motivated three of them to meet at Mecca after

Editors' note: Actually it was the Ḫawārij who accused Imām ᶜAlī, not to mention Muᶜāwiyaẖ, of being disbelievers. Imām ᶜAlī on the other hand is famous for having said that the Ḫawārij were neither *disbelievers* (*kāfirūn*) nor *hypocrites* (*munāfiqūn*); rather they were *strayers and deviants* (*māriqūn*): "They fly lawlessly from the way of Allāh like an arrow flies from a bow." يَمرُقُونَ مِن دِينِ ٱللهِ كَمَا يَمرُقُ ٱلسَّهمُ مِنَ ٱلقَو.

the pilgrimage in 660 and plan to murder ᶜAlī (d. 661), Muᶜāwiyaẖ (d. 680), and ᶜAmr b. al-ᶜĀṣṣ. Their aim was to end the political conflict and the years-long civil war, among whose victims they, the Ḫawārij, were. At their meeting the three Ḫawārij discussed the conditions of the people and found their rulers' behavior shameful. They recalled their casualties at Nahrawān (Nuwayrī 1975, Vol. 20,p. 205), and plotted the assassinations noted above (Ḥayṭamī 1994, Vol. 9, p. 193). It is related that ᶜAbdu ãl-Raḥmān b. Muljam rose and said, "I will kill ᶜAlī" (Mubarrad 1994, Vol. 2, p. 597); then al-Ḥajjāj b. ᶜAbdillāh aẖ-Sarīmiyy (d. 660), nicknamed "al-Burak," stood up and said, "I am for Muᶜāwiyaẖ"(Ibn Kaṯīr 1988, Vol. 4, p. 38). According to another tradition the one who undertook to kill Muᶜāwiyaẖ was called Nazzāl b. ᶜĀmir (Dīnawrī 1995, p. 197). The third, ᶜAmr b. Bakr (d. 660), rose and said, "I will kill ᶜAmr b. al-ᶜĀṣṣ" (Ibnu ãl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 3, p. 389). Another tradition states that the one who assumed responsibility for killing ᶜAmr b. al-ᶜĀṣṣ was called ᶜAbdullāh b. Mālik aẖ-Ṣīdāwī (Dīnawrī 1995, p. 197). The three men selected 17 Ramaḍān 661 as the day of the killing (Ṭabarī 1879, Vol. 4, p. 110), although another tradition puts the date at 21 Ramaḍān (Mubarrad 1994, Vol. 2, p. 597).

Each man travelled to the city where his target lived. ᶜAbdu ãl-Raḥmān b. Muljam went to Kufa where he met his Ḫawārij friends. He visited each in turn telling them of his secret mission (Ibnu ãl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 4, p. 119). He kept it until he met a woman from the Ḫawārij called Qaṭām whose father and brother were killed in Nahwaran. Qaṭām was very beautiful and Ibn Muljam expressed his wish to marry her. Qaṭām agreed, but set the conditions of 3000 *drachma* (*dirham*) and the murder of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib

as a dowry (Qurṭubī 1995, Vol. 3, p. 218). They married after he told her about the secret of his coming to Kufa. He told her about his intention to kill ᶜAlī on a specific and agreed date. She encouraged and helped him, and enlisted the aid of a relative, Mujāšiᶜ b. Wardān b. ᶜAlqamah. They were joined by a third, called Šabīb b. Bajrah (d. 660) (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 3, p. 389).

On the appointed night the three took their poisoned swords and sat opposite the door through which ᶜAlī left to pray. As ᶜAlī came out, calling: *Come to pray! Come to pray!* Šabīb approached him and struck at him with his sword, but he missed his target. Then Ibn Muljam struck him on his head and said, "The rule is for God, O ᶜAlī, not for you and your friends!" (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 3, p. 389).[2]

ᶜALĪ'S PREMONITION OF HIS ASSASSINATION

Most of the Sunnī and Shīᶜī early and later sources on ᶜAlī's murder stated that ᶜAlī knew without any doubt that he was going to be killed, and that he would be killed by ᶜAbdu l-āl-Raḥmān b. Muljam. A tradition related by a companion of the Prophet says that he said to ᶜAlī (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1970, Vol. 4, p. 116),

> *You will not die until you receive a blow on this that makes this red [he pointed at his forehead and beard] and the most wretched one will kill you, in the*

[2] See also Nuwayrī (1975, Vol. 20, p. 209), Ibn Kaṯīr (1988, Vol. 7, p. 339), Ibn Saᶜd (1903, Vol. 3, p. 34), Mubarrad (1994, Vol. 2, p. 598), Ibn Qutaybah (1990, Vol. 1, p. 180), Dīnawrī (1995, p. 198), Ṭabarī (1879, Vol. 4, p. 111), Hayṯamī (1994, Vol. 9, p. 194), Balāḏurī (1996, Vol. 3, p. 255), and Ibn Abī āl-Dunyā (1991, pp. 30–33).

same way as the most wretched one of Banū Ṯamūd wounded God's she-camel.

According to another tradition also related to the Prophet, he said to ᶜAlī (Hayṯamī 1994, Vol. 9, p. 187),

> You are a man leaving his place for others and you are to be killed, and this [pointing at his beard] will be dyed with blood from this [pointing at his forehead; meaning his beard would be bloodied from his head].

ᶜAlī used to repeat this sentence many times,

لَتُخَضَّبَنَّ هٰذِهِ مِن هٰذِهِ.

This one [beard] will be dyed red from this [forehead].

He also gave as witness the following verses (Ibnu āl-Jawzī 1968, Vol. 1, p. 129) (Mubarrad 1994, Vol. 2, p. 599):

أُشدُد حَيَازِيمَكَ لِلمَوتِ فَإِنَّ المَوتَ آتِيكَا؛

وَ لَا تَجزَأ مِنَ القَتلِ إِذَا حَلَّ بِوَادِيكَا.

[ᶜAlī speaks to himself saying:]
Prepare *yourself bravely to face Death,*
Death is coming to you;
And *don't be afraid and sad*
if it alights in your valley (comes to you).

Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 952) quoted in his Musnad another *ḥadīṯ* that gives the same meaning in a different way (Ibn Ḥanbal 1971, Vol. 2, p. 802–03). Some sources mention many traditions that imply that ᶜAlī had seen his murderer and

knew him but let him live despite his knowledge and belief that he was the one who would kill him. The sources imply that ᶜAlī believed in God's will and judgment. When Ibn Muljam was coming to him, he used to say (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 193):[3]

أُرِيدُ حَيٰوتَهُ وَ يُرِيدُ قَتلِي؛ عَذِيرُكَ مِن خَلِيلِكَ مِن مُرَادِ.

I want his life (I want him to stay alive) and
he wants my killing;
You have no excuse for your friend's from
Murād tribe.

Moreover, in his sleep ᶜAlī had several times seen the Prophet, who told him that the end of his life had arrived. His end was approaching and his death was imminent (Rāwandī 1991, Vol. 1, p. 233).

Ibnu ãl-Athīr tells this story. When the month of Ramaḍān came, ᶜAlī walked one evening to visit al-Ḥasan, one evening to visit al-Ḥusayn, and one evening to visit Abū Jaᶜfar. After eating not more than three mouthfuls, he said: "I would like God's order (death) while I am hungry." No more than a night or two passed before his killing took place (Ibnu ãl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 3, p. 388).

Other sources mention that while he was going out during the night of his killing, ᶜAlī came across some geese cackling. He said to the people of his house, "Let them; they are mourners" (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 198) (Ibn Abī ãl-Dunyā 1991, p. 24). The meaning is, "Let the geese cackle because they are mourning my death which will come soon." Majlisī (d.1700) adds, "ᶜAlī announced his own

3 See also Ḫawārizmī (1965, p. 284), Qurṭubī (1995, Vol. 3, p. 220).

death in one of his speeches and his killing" (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 193). The Shīᶜī sources add that ᶜAlī also knew the place of his grave (Ibn Ṭāwūs n.d., pp. 29–35).

THE BURIAL OF IMĀM ᶜALĪ B. ABĪ ṬĀLIB

The sources we possess say that ᶜAlī died at the moment ᶜAbdu āl-Raḥmān b. Muljam struck him with his poisoned sword (Ṭabarī 1879, Vol. 2, p. 330) (Aṣbahānī 1988, Vol. 1, p. 292). The popular view, which is far more frequent in the sources, is that ᶜAlī did not die immediately; he remained alive, suffering for two or three days at most. He remained alive during Friday and Saturday and died on Sunday evening (Ḏahabī 1997, Vol. 3, p. 650).[4] An interesting story that many sources relate is that a skilled doctor from Iraq tried to treat ᶜAlī in an attempt to stop the spread of poison in his body. But he failed, and left ᶜAlī fighting against time till he breathed his last in his bed at his home in Kufa (Ibn Abī āl-Dunyā 1991, p. 40) (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 23). After his death his sons washed the body and his eldest son, al-Ḥasan, prayed over him. The sources differ on the number of times he said "Allāhu Akbar" in his praying. Some say he said it four times, others nine (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1970, Vol. 4, p. 122).[5] Some sources give different versions (Hayṯamī 1994, Vol. 9, p. 198) (Ṭabarī 1879, Vol. 4, p. 114).

The burial of ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is clouded in obscurity. As we know, ᶜAlī is considered the first caliph whose burial

[4] See Masᶜūdī (1997, Vol. 2, p. 347), Ibnu āl-Jawzī (n.d., p. 178), Balāḏurī (1996, Vol. 3, p. 265), Ibn Qutaybaẖ (1990, Vol. 1, p. 181), Ibn Saᶜd (1903, Vol. 3, p. 35), Ibnu āl-Aṯīr (1970, Vol. 4, p. 120), Mubarrad (1994, Vol. 2, p. 599), and Ḫawārizmī (1965, p. 284).

[5] See also Ibn Saᶜd (1903, Vol. 3, p. 35), Balāḏurī (1996, Vol. 3, p. 257).

was concealed from the people. The early Sunnī and Shīᶜī sources are unanimous in saying that ᶜAlī's burial was held late at night, for fear that the people might know the place of his grave. As a further precaution, his family concealed the location of his grave and kept the secret to themselves as best as they could (Ibn Abī āl-Dunyā 1991, pp. 62–64).[6] We found only one ancient source relating a tradition that a crowd of people had attended the modest process of burial. This is an isolated tradition; the commonly accepted one is that the process of burial took place before the morning prayer and ᶜAlī's grave was concealed from the eyes of the people (Balāḏurī 1996, Vol. 3, p. 257).

In my view, the chief motive behind the concealment of the process of burial and the location of the grave was ᶜAlī's request before his death. He might have been concerned that the Ḫawārij and Banū Umayyaẖ would exhume his body, and this might impel his sons and his supporters to war. This could cause more schisms and fighting, and the shedding of Muslim blood.

The early Shīᶜī sources clearly reveal the great fear of ᶜAlī and his family of the audacity of Banū Umayyaẖ, on the one hand, and the Ḫawārij on the other. They were afraid that they would dig up the grave and violate the body if they knew its whereabouts. Ibn Kaṯīr says, "He was buried at the *Qaṣru āl-Imārah* (*Palace of the Governor*) in Kufa for fear that the Ḫawārij might dig up the grave and take out his body and violate it" (Ibn Kaṯīr 1988, Vol. 7, p. 342). Al-Ṭabarsī states, "According to his will, the place of his burial was concealed in that place, because he knew

[6] See also Ibn Qutaybaẖ (1990, Vol. 1, p. 181), Ṭabarī (1953, Vol. 2, p. 330), Ibnu āl-Aṯīr (1970, Vol. 4, p. 122), and Ibnu āl-Jawzī (n.d., p. 178).

about the Umayyad state after him" (Ṭabarsī 1979, p. 162). Similar traditions are mentioned in other sources.[7]

The intuition of ᶜAlī and his family was undoubtedly right. Muᶜāwiyaẖ b. Abī Sufyān and other Umayyad caliphs knew no bounds in besmirching the name of ᶜAlī and his family. They also went to excessive lengths in persecuting them at different places and times during the Umayyad caliphate.

There is another tradition by Majlisī, related to al-Ḥāriṯ b. Ḥasīra. The police commander of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Ṯaqafī dug several holes in the ground in Kufa looking for ᶜAlī's body. Finally, he found the body of an old man with a white beard. He told al-Ḥajjāj about it but al-Ḥajjāj ordered him to return it to its place because al-Ḥajjāj said that al-Ḥusayn had moved the body to Medina and buried it there (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 329).

If we accept this tradition, we must conclude that the plan which ᶜAlī's family devised achieved its goal of creating the impression of confusion around a variety of places in which or around which ᶜAlī was buried. For example, the Shīᶜīs say that ᶜAlī asked his sons before his death to dig graves in several places, and that ᶜAlī chose one of them before he died. Thus ᶜAlī ensured concealment of the place of his grave. Ibn Ṭāwūs says (Ibn Ṭāwūs n.d., p. 36) (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 214),

> ᶜAlī ordered his son al-Ḥasan to dig four graves in four places: in the mosque, in Raḥbaẖ, in Ġariyy, and in the house of Juᶜdaẖ b. Hubayraẖ. By this

[7] See for example:Ibn ᶜAsākir (1980, Vol. 3, p. 377), Kanjī (1970, p. 471), Ḏahabī (1997, 1–2:636), and Rāwandī (1991, Vol. 1, p. 234).

means he wanted none of his enemies to know about the location of his grave.

Actually, this tradition does not express categorically the differences concerning the location of ᶜAlī's grave. The sources that have reached us mention more than one place. However, I sought to expose the reasons for such differences by examining the various versions of the traditions and testing their credibility.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN AL̃-T̲AWIYYAH̃[8]

Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn ᶜAsākir convey this tradition: "Al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī carried his father and buried him in al̃-T̲awiyyah̃." But neither historian related it to any source, which indicates its weakness (Ibn ᶜAsākir 1980, Vol. 3, p. 378) (Baġdādī 1931, p. 138). I found no connection between al̃-T̲awiyyah̃ and ᶜAlī's grave in other sources.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN AL-KUNĀSAH̃[9]

Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baghdādī and al-Balādhurī mention that ᶜAlī's grave is in al-Kunāsah̃, but they do not relate this tradition to any source. Because al-Kunāsah̃ is a dunghill, and because of the weakness of the tradition, I find it hard to accept this view; I doubt that al-Kunāsah̃ would be deemed a proper place to bury a respected Islāmic personage such as ᶜAlī.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN QAṢRU ÃL-IMĀRAH̃

Some sources mention that ᶜAlī's grave is in *Qaṣru ãl-Imārah̃* (*the governor's palace*) in Kufa. This is the site

[8] About al̃-T̲awiyyah̃ see Ḥamawī (1979, Vol. 2, p. 87).
[9] About al-Kunāsah̃ see Ḥamawī (1979, Vol. 4, p. 481).

of the center of government. Ibn Taymiyyah says, "It is commonly known among the people of knowledge that ᶜAlī was buried at the Palace of the Government in Kufa, as Muᶜāwiyah was buried in Qaṣru āl-Imārah in Syria, and ᶜAmr b. al-ᶜĀṣṣ was buried in Egypt, for fear that the Ḫawārij might dig up their graves" (Ibn Taymiyyah 1987, Vol. 5, p. 367). Ibn Taymiyyah's assumption is certainly reasonable, though he ignored or forgot that ᶜAlī's enemies were not only from the Ḫawārij but from the Umayyads too.

Other historians such as al-Yāfiᶜī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn Qutaybah concur with Ibn Taymiyyah that ᶜAlī was buried in Qaṣru āl-Imārah (Ibn Qutaybah 1990, Vol. 1, p. 181),[10] but these traditions do not define the place of burial accurately. Al-Ṭabarī says in his tradition, "He was buried at Masjidu āl-Jamāᶜah (the Mosque of the Group) at Qaṣru āl-Imārah" (Ṭabarī 1879, Vol. 4, p. 117). However, al-Yāfiᶜī says, "And he was buried at Qaṣru āl-Imārah at the Mosque" Yāfiᶜī (1997, Vol. 1, p. 89). Add to them Ibn Qutaybah (Ibn Qutaybah 1990, Vol. 1, p. 181). Even Ibn Kaṯīr, who gave more weight to the view that ᶜAlī was buried in Qaṣru āl-Imārah and made it famous, notes other traditions referring to different places (Ibn Kaṯīr 1988, Vol. 7, p. 342).

While some historians distinguish the two places, others refer to them as one. For example, Ibnu āl-Jawzī, al-Nuwayrī, and Ibnu āl-Athīr distinguish Qaṣru āl-Imārah from the Mosque of Kufa (Nuwayrī 1975, Vol. 20, p. 217–18),[11] but Ibn ᶜAsākir and Ibn Qutaybah tend to treat

[10] See also Ṭabarī (1879, Vol. 4, p. 117), Yāfiᶜī (1997, Vol. 1, p. 89).

[11] See also Ibnu āl-Jawzī (n.d., pp. 178–79), Ibn Kaṯīr (1988, Vol. 3, p. 396).

the two as one place, uniting the *qaṣr* (*palace*) with the mosque (Ibn ᶜAsākir 1980, Vol. 3, p. 378) (Ibn Qutaybah̃ 1981, p. 209). However, this confusion of places is not limited to the Qaṣr and the Mosque or Dāru āl-'Imārah̃; it extends to other places in Kufa such as al̃-Raḥbah̃ and al̃-Suddah̃. Ibn Sa'd combines Masjidu āl-Jamāᶜah̃ (the Mosque of the Group) and al-Raḥbah̃ (Ibn Saᶜd 1903, Vol. 3, p. 35). Al-Nuwayrī distinguishes them and considers al̃-Raḥbah̃ a Masjidu āl-Jamāᶜah̃ (Nuwayrī 1975, Vol. 20, p. 218). Ibn Ḥajar al-ᶜAsqalānī says, "Al-Qaṣr is not al̃-Raḥbah̃" (ᶜAsqalānī 1994, Vol. 7, p. 287).

So no agreement exists among the traditions that al̃-Raḥbah̃ is the place where ᶜAlī was buried. There is also disagreement as to the exact location of al-Raḥbah̃. Is it the "Raḥbah̃ of the Mosque" or "Raḥbah̃ of the Qaṣru āl-Imārah̃"?

As for al̃-Suddah̃, al-Balādhurī points out that this is the place where ᶜAlī was buried (Balāḏurī 1996, Vol. 3, p. 257), but al-Balādhurī's tradition is the only one that is not ascribed to a reliable authority. Nor does this source define al̃-Suddah̃ as a geographical place with specific features. He does not tell us which Suddah̃ he means exactly: is it the Suddah̃ from which ᶜAlī departed when he was killed, or is it another Suddah̃ unconnected to the first (Ibn Kaṯīr 1988, Vol. 7, p. 339)?

Finally, we note that the differences among traditions stem from the weakness in ascriptions and weakness of the texts in definition and specification.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL AT THE HOUSE OF JUᶜDAH̃ B. HUBAYRAH̃

Juᶜdah̃ was from Qurayš of the Banū Maḫzūm. He was ᶜAlī's nephew, son of his sister Umm Hani' bint Abī Ṭālib.

Juᶜdaẖ was the governor of Ḫurāsān during ᶜAlī's caliphate. He lived in Kufa where he owned houses (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1970, Vol. 1, p. 340). Some sources mention that al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī said, "I buried my father ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in a chamber of one of the houses of Juᶜdaẖ b. Ḥubayraẖ" (Ibn ᶜAsākir 1980, Vol. 3, p. 375).[12] ᶜAlī is also said to have appointed Juᶜdaẖ as his successor and vicegerent after Ibn Muljam struck him with his sword (Qurṭubī 1995, Vol. 20, p. 210).

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL AT THE HOUSE OF YAZĪD B. ḪĀLID[13]

Ibn ᶜAsākir, Ibn Kaṯīr, and al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baghdādī, referring to the same authority and text, state that a person called Ḫālid b. ᶜAbdullāh wished to excavate the foundations for the house of his son Yazīd. During the work he found the body of a *šayḫ* (*old man*) with a white beard and white hair. The body was still soft as if it had been buried the day before. He wanted to burn the body, but he suddenly stopped after he became convinced it was ᶜAlī's. He wrapped it in its shrouds again, and replaced it in its original place (Ibn ᶜAsākir 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 375–376).[14]

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN MEDĪNA

There is no doubt that ᶜAlī's assassination occurred at Kufa. As for the place of his burial we feel that we know more than the ancients. One of the traditions says that ᶜAlī's body was carried to Medina in Ḥijāz and buried in al-Baqīᶜ cemetery, where the Prophet, and his companions,

[12] See also Baġdādī (1931, Vol. 1, p. 136), Ibn Kaṯīr (1988, Vol. 7, p. 343).
[13] (Zirikli 1986, Vol. 2, p. 297).
[14] See also Baġdādī (1931, Vol. 1, p. 137), Ibn Kaṯīr (1988, Vol. 7, p. 343).

were buried, as was ᶜAlī's wife, Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter. Thomas Forster confirms this view. He visited Medina in the 16th century and in his description of the city, he says (Hakluyt n.d., Vol. 3, p. 195):

> Beyond the mosque of the Prophet, there are two graves covered with green curtains; in one of them Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter is buried and in the other ᶜAlī, her husband, is buried.

This view was confirmed by more than one of the early historians (Ḏahabī 1987, Vol. 3, p. 651).[15] Kanjī added in his book *Kifāyatu āl-Ṭālib* that ᶜAlī commanded that he be buried in Medina with his wife Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (Kanjī 1970, p. 470). In a tradition by al-Balādhurī, it is implied that al-Ḥusayn and not al-Ḥasan was the one who carried his father's body to Medina, and that was after the signing of the "peace agreement" between his brother al-Ḥasan and Muᶜāwiyah in 661 (Balāḏurī 1996, Vol. 3, pp. 257–258).

I maintain that the burial of ᶜAlī's body in Medina could not have been an easy task or a mission that could be concealed or hidden. We must add two more factors. First, Islām as a religion ordered its believers to bury the body as soon as possible after death. Second, to transport the body from Kufa to Medina would have taken many days in that age, and carrying the body across the desert in a harsh climate would certainly cause it to decay. The members of ᶜAlī's family were no doubt aware of this fact, being desert dwellers. They would be presumably be very careful about the safety of the body. On the other hand, the protection of the body from their enemies, Banū Umayyah

[15] See also Ḏahabī (1997, 1–2:637), Baġdādī (1931, Vol. 1, p. 137), and Ibnu āl-Jawzī (1995, Vol. 3, p. 417).

and the Ḫawārij, for the prolonged journey would be no simple mission.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN THE LAND OF ṬAYᵓ AND THE STORY OF THE WANDERING CAMEL

Some people from the tribe of Ṭayᵓ claimed that they came across a stray camel in the desert during the night of ᶜAlī's burial. It had a box on its back, which the people of Ṭayᵓ thought contained gold and money. They pursued the animal and caught it, but when they discovered that the box contained a dead body, they buried it and slaughtered the camel and ate it. The news spread around and reached Banū Umayyah̄, who believed it. In this context, al-Walīd b. ᶜUqbah̄ (Yaᶜqūbī 1960, Vol. 2, p. 178) composed some lines of poetry:

فَإِن يَكُ قَد ضَلَّ ٱلبَعِيرُ بِمَحمَلِهِ

فَمَا كَانَ مَهدِيًّا وَ لَا «كَانَ» هَادِيًا.

If the camel lost its way with its load on
it was not apt to be guided or be guide.

More than one historian has mentioned this tradition (Ibn ᶜAsākir 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 387–388).[16]

My view is that this story is unbelievable, because ᶜAlī's family would not have allowed the camel to go astray or permit Banū Ṭayᵓ to do such a thing to ᶜAlī's body. If this had happened, most people would know ᶜAlī's burial place, not Banū Ṭayᵓ only. It would be only natural for people to have learned of the event then. We recall that Banū Ṭayᵓ

[16] Baġdādī (1931, Vol. 1, p. 138), Masᶜūdī (1997, Vol. 2, p. 347), and Ibn Kaṯīr (1988, Vol. 7, p. 342).

lived scattered over many places, some in Ḥijāz, some in Iraq, and some in Syria. Ibn Kaṯīr confirms this view: "He who said that ᶜAlī's body was carried by his camel that went astray made a mistake and claimed to know what he did not know and this cannot be accepted by any reason or law"(Ibn Kaṯīr 1988, Vol. 7, p. 342).

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN NAJAF IN IRAQ

Despite the different views about the place of ᶜAlī's burial, the Shīᶜī scholars in general agree that ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the fourth caliph and the first of the imāms, was buried in Najaf, four miles from Kufa. This is the prevailing belief of the common people (Donaldson 1946, p. 70). Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 693), a Shīᶜī theologian, wrote a book confirming the burial of ᶜAlī's body at al-Ġariyy in Najaf. He called his book *Farḥaṯu āl-Ġariyy* and he mentioned a number of the traditions that reinforce the claim that ᶜAlī was buried in Najaf. (These traditions are discussed below.) Ibn Ṭāwūs relates one tradition to Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, in which he relates that when he went to al-Ḥīrah he used to visit ᶜAlī's grave at al-Ġariyy in Najaf, pray at it throughout the night, and leave at dawn. This is a reference to their keeping the place secret and their avoidance of revealing it to the common people (Ibn Ṭāwūs n.d., 56–58).

Several ancient and modern historians tend to accept this view, which considers al-Ġariyy or Najaf near Kufa as the place where ᶜAlī was buried. Ibn Abī āl-Ḥadīd discusses the different views about ᶜAlī's burial place and confirms that it is at al-Ġariyy. He says (Ibn Abī āl-Ḥadīd 1998, Vol. 1, p. 17),

> And his grave [ᶜAlī's grave] is at al-Ġariyy. The controversies among the possessors of Ḥadīth, that

> his body was carried to Medina or that it was buried in the Raḥbaẖ of the Mosque, or at the door of Qaṣru ãl-Imārah in Kufa, or that the camel that carried it went astray in the desert and was taken by the Arabs who dwell in the desert - all these views are false; his sons [ᶜAlī's sons] know more about his grave and the sons of most people know more about the graves of their fathers than foreigners. This is the grave, which his sons visited when they came to Iraq. One of them was Jaᶜfar b. Muḥammad, peace be upon him, and others of the dignitaries and notables of the people.

Many of the Shīᶜī and Sunnī authors confirm this view (Iṣfahānī 1990, p. 42),[17] and Šayẖ al-Mufid adds (Mufid 1995, Vol. 1, p. 24) (Rāwandī 1991, Vol. 1, p. 234),

> A group of those who accepted the view of ᶜAlī's burial in Najaf mentioned that he requested this before his death; and he told the members of his family to be satisfied with carrying the rear of the coffin because the angels would carry its front. This indicates that the burial place of ᶜAlī was known to the angels, and God had defined its location. It was said also that ᶜAlī told them that he would be brought to al-Ġariyy to be buried there.

Some authors exaggerated this information by saying that a horseman walked towards the procession of the funeral

[17] See also Ibn Šahrᵓāšūb (1991, Vol. 2, p. 387), Kūfī (1992, Vol. 1, p. 509), Ḫawārizmī (1965, p. 284), Ibnu ãl-Wardi (1969, Vol. 1, p. 164), Abū ãl-Fidāᵓ (1997, p. 190), Kanjī (1970, p. 471), and Ibn ᶜAsākir (1980, Vol. 3, p. 377).

and argued with ᶜAlī's sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. After he disclosed his secret, it was found out that it was ᶜAlī himself, since he said: "He witnesses every soul that dies; cannot he witness his own body?" (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, pp. 300–310) Some authors stated, "The people dug up his burial place at al-Ġariyy but they did not find anything in the grave" (Ṭabarsī 1979, p. 203).

Ibnu āl-Athīr, however, gave more weight to the view that ᶜAlī was buried in Najaf. He added that this place was visited and people were blessed by it (Ibnu āl-Aṯīr 1979, Vol. 3, p. 396). Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī and Ibn Baṭūṭaḥ agreed with him on this (Ḥamawī 1979, Vol. 5, p. 271) (Ibn Baṭūṭaḥ 1964, p. 176). Several traditions concern the revelation of ᶜAlī's grave in Najaf, some of them mentioned by al-Mustawfī in his book *Nuzhaẗu āl-Qulūb*:

> Two parasangs away to the northeast of Kufa is located the *mašhad* of ᶜAlīAmīru āl-Muᵓminīn, which is known by the name *al-Mašhad al-Ġarawī*. [A mašhad is a place where a martyr has died or is buried.]

When ᶜAlī was fatally injured, he requested that after he died his body be carried on a camel. The camel should be set free and the place it stopped would be his burial place. They did as he desired; it happened that the camel knelt down at the place of the *mašhad* today, so ᶜAlī is buried there.

This story calls to mind the Prophet Muḥammad (Ṣ) when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina, where he was cordially received by the notables of the city who insisted that he stay with them. Then the Prophet said he would release the reins of his she-camel and he would follow it and

sojourn at the place where the she-camel knelt. The camel knelt at the tribe of Banū Mālik al-Najjār at Qubā', and there was built the first mosque in Islām (Poonawala 1985, p. 642). Al-Mustawfī appears to seek connection between the first mosque in Islām and ᶜAlī's *mašhad*. He implies that both of them are important and holy for Muslims. The Prophet Muḥammad gives freedom to his she-camel; similarly, ᶜAlī gaves freedom to his she-camel to choose his grave. Why not? He is his heir!

The blessed place was not revealed during the rule of the Umayyad caliphate, or even during the Abbasid caliphate, until the reign Hārūn al-Rašīd (reigned 786–809).

Once during 791 Hārūn al-Rašīd chanced to go out hunting in this area. His horse raced after the prey. It bolted, and took shelter beside the grave but it could not enter. This event left an impression on Hārūn al-Rašīd. He asked the people about the place. They told him that it was ᶜAlī's grave. Hārūn al-Rašīd gave orders to dig up the earth, and he found ᶜAlī body stretched out. He had a dome built over it and people went to live nearby.

ᶜALĪ'S BURIAL IN MAZAR-I SHARIF IN AFGHANISTAN

Some sources mention that ᶜAlī's grave is in Mazar-i Sharif in the north of Afghanistan but they do not mention how ᶜAlī's body arrived there and how it was buried. They, however, mention that the tomb of caliph ᶜAlī in Mazar-i Shrif was discovered here and its genuineness declared to have been proved in 1480 during the reign of

the Timurid Sultan Ḥusayn.[18] The place became a *mazār place of pilgrimage*, which at once arose around the tomb with considerable market. The second tomb, which is still standing, (the first is said to have been destroyed by Genghis Khan),was built in 1481–2. The *mazār* does not seem to have been of any particular importance during the time of the Uzbeks and is hardly mentioned, although several Uzbek sultans were buried there. In the first half of the 19th century, the place was usually simply called Mazār by travellers; the name Mazar-i Sharif seems only to have arisen within the last hundred years (Bosworth 1960, Vol. 6, p. 942).

ᶜALĪ'S GRAVE AND THE GRAVES OF SOME OTHER PROPHETS

Above I gave more credence to the view that ᶜAlī was buried in Najaf (Ḥamawī 1979, Vol. 5, pp. 271–272), which is situated at the edge of the Western Desert in Iraq, west of Kufa. The Shīᶜīs have always worked to elevate the status of Najaf and the surrounding cities, especially Kufa, aiming at enhancing the position of ᶜAlī and of the other imāms buried in nearby areas of this hallowed ground. They intentionally sanctified it and narrated all kinds of related and unrelated traditions around it. Such traditions so reinforced its rank and status that it finally became one of the holiest places for the Shīᶜīs.

As for the mosque of Kufa, many stories have been told glorifying its virtues, but the Shīᶜīs were not content to make Kufa, its mosque, and the surroundings holy places.

[18] On the first discovery of the tomb of ᶜAlī see Ġarnaṭī (1925, pp. 145–148); and on the second discovery, Ḫwandamir (1855, Vol. 3, pp. 260–261).

They went beyond, and made it a great burial place for many prophets and saintly people.

Because ᶜAlī and other prophets are buried in Najaf, its soil has become sacred. It is the hope of every Shīᶜī in the world to be buried in the holy land of Najaf, so he will benefit from Ali's mediation on Judgment Day and so be restored to Paradise on Resurrection Day without being called to a reckoning. An interesting example to illustrate this belief is the burial of ᶜAḍūdu āl̃-Dawlaẖ al-Buwayhī (d. 983), who died in Baghdād and asked to be buried in Najaf near ᶜAlī's grave. He was indeed buried there, and a special cemetery was built for him. Ibnu āl-Jawzī, the renowned historian, notes that the following words were carved on his grave (Ibnu āl-Jawzī 1995, Vol. 14, p. 30):

> This is the grave of ᶜAḍūdu āl̃-Dawlaẖ and Tāju āl-Millaẖ Abū Šujāᶜ b. Rukni āl̃-Dawlaẖ. He loved to be near this infallible imām, wishing for his salvation when the time comes that every soul will have to defend itself. Thank God, and may his prayer be upon our Lord Muḥammad and his pure family.

The interment of ᶜAḍūdu āl̃-Dawlaẖ al-Buwayhī in the area around Kufa and Najaf indicates the significance of this place. Let us bear in mind that ᶜAḍūdu āl̃-Dawlaẖ was a Shīᶜī, the first to make ᶜAlī's grave known after it was hidden in Najaf; it was he who built a dome over it. I do not argue that the position of Najaf was reinforced by the burial there of ᶜAḍūdu āl̃-Dawlaẖ; the place was already considered holy. However, this burial is an additional indication of its importance and value in Shīᶜī eyes at that time. For the Shīᶜīs, it was the burial place of ᶜAlī, and of an entire group of prophets, messengers, and

famous persons who preceded him. This is a unanimous view taken by the early and late Shīᶜī theologians and jurisprudents alike.

Many traditions that the Shīᶜīs depend on were passed down through the years. Such traditions draw attention to the presence of many cemeteries for different prophets on the land of Najaf. Ibn Baṭūṭah̄, for example, describes ᶜAlī's grave (Ibn Baṭūṭah̄ 1964, p. 177):

> In the center under the dome, there is a square stone bench covered with wood that is covered with gold sheets with artful engravings and nailed with silver nails that hid the wood. It is less tall than a person's stature. There are three graves there. It is claimed that one of them is Adam's grave, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, and the second is Nūḥ's grave, may God's prayer and peace be upon him, and the third is ᶜAlī's grave, may God be pleased with him. Among the graves there are gold and silver tumblers filled with flower water and musk and all kinds of scents, where the visitor dips his hand and anoints his face with it for blessing.

As for the Shīᶜī sources, ᶜAbdu āl-Karīm Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions in his book *Farḥaṫu āl-Ġariyy* the place of Adam's grave, citing a tradition by al-Mufaḍḍal b. ᶜUmar al-Juᶜfī (Ibn Ṭāwūs 1993, Vol. 2, pp. 85–86):[19]

> I came to ᶜAlī b. Abī ᶜAbdullāh [Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth imām], may peace be upon him, and said to him: "I would like to visit Amīru āl-Muʾminīn [ᶜAlī]", and I said to him: "I miss al-Ġariyy." He

[19] See also Majlisī (1983, Vol. 11, p. 268), Sabzawārī (1993, pp. 71–72).

said, *Why do you miss it?* I said: I would like to visit Amīru ãl-Muʾminīn, peace upon him. He said: *Do you know the advantage of visiting him?* I said: No, son of the Messenger of God, unless you tell me. He said: *If you visit the grave of Amīru ãl-Muʾminīn, peace upon him, you should know that you are visiting Adam's bones and Nūḥ's body, and ᶜAlī's body, peace upon him.* I said: Adam descended in Sarandeeb [Ceylon/Sri Lanka] at sunrise, and it is claimed that his bones are at the Kaᶜbaẖ. How is it that his bones came to Kufa?

He said: *God, the Great and Almighty, inspired Nūḥ while he was on the ark [ship] to circumambulate the Kaᶜbaẖ; He also inspired him and Nūḥ went down into the water, which reached his knees, and took out a coffin with Adam's bones, peace upon him, and carried it into the ark. He circled with it as long as God wanted and finally he came to the door of Kufa in the middle of its mosque. There, God said to the land, "O Earth! Swallow thy water and O Sky be cleared of clouds!" And the water was made to subside. And it [the ship] came to rest upon [the mount al-Jūdī] and it was said (Q 11:44): **A far removal for wrongdoing folk!**.*[20]

The ship swallowed its water in the mosque of Kufa, and the people who were on the ship left. Then Nūḥ took the coffin of Adam and buried it in al-Ġariyy, which is part of the mountain on which God talked to Moses and made it holy and made Abraham God's friend and made Muḥammad his lover and made it a house for After Adam and Nūḥ, there is

[20] English translation by Pickthall (n.d., p. 209).

no more noble one than Amīru ãl-Muᵓminīn to be housed in it.

This tradition, which is related by more than one Shīᶜī transmitter, means, despite some of its elements, that the Shīᶜīs accept the belief of Adam's existence in al-Ġariyy near ᶜAlī's grave. We have seen in this tradition that Adam, inspired by God, was first buried in holy Mecca, but his bones were moved by Nūḥ during the great flood to al-Ġariyy in Najaf, where ᶜAlī was buried after several centuries.

An association is evident between the Kaᶜbah and al-Ġariyy, which is not accidental. Sunnīs and Shīᶜīs agree that Adam's burial place is inside holy Mecca and its surroundings, but the Shīᶜīs add that his remains were moved from Mecca to al-Ġariyy because of the iniquity of the people of Mecca. God took revenge on them by changing the fresh water of Zamzam into salty water. God replaced it by the Furāt river (the Euphrates), which he made one of the rivers of Paradise, according to Shīᶜī sources.

Majlisī writes in his book *Biḥāru ãl-Anwār*, quoting Kulaynī's book Furūᶜu ãl-Kāfī, the following (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 11, p. 260):

> It is related from Abū Jaᶜfar, peace upon him, that between ãl-Rukn [the corner or angle where the Black Stone of the Kaᶜbah is] and al-Maqām [a small building near the Kaᶜbah in Mecca housing a stone with Abraham's footprints] there are graves of prophets and Adam is in God's holy place.

Another tradition was added to this (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 11, p. 267):

> And he was buried in Mecca and there are one thousand and five hundred years between Adam and Nūḥ, peace upon him.

The insertion of Nūḥ into this tradition was not accidental or unintentional. On the contrary: as I see it, Majlisī wished to prepare the ground for subsequent traditions that connect Adam and Nūḥ more profoundly. The Shīᶜis describe this connection in detail, and it occupies a place in their thinking and religious attitudes. This is because Nūḥ has an additional role and contribution, which is discussed below.

The Shīᶜī sources are cautious in their traditions, aware of the importance of harmony between them and those of the Sunnīs. The tradition of Majlisī accords with the traditions of the Sunnīs, whose sources present two views concerning Nūḥ's burial. The first confirms the view that Adam's burial is in the environs of Mecca. This was related by al-Kisāʾī in his book Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ (Kisāʾī 1922, Vol. 1, p. 78):

> Then they buried it [Adam's body] in a hole where his head was in Kaᶜbaẖ and his legs stretched to their length.

Ibn Kaṯīr says,

> They disagreed on the question of the place of Adam's burial. The common view is that he was buried in the place of his fall in India, but it is said also on the mountain of Abū Qabīs in Mecca.

Al-Ṯaᶜlabī says,

> There is no agreement on his [Adam's] burial place. Ibn Isḥāq said that it is in East Paradise and others said it is in a cave in Abū Qabīs, which is called "the Great Cave." Abū Ṣāliḥ mentions that Ibn ᶜAbbās said, "Adam died on the mountain of Nūd in India."

Looking deeply into these traditions, we observe that they agree that Adam's grave is in Mecca or the surroundings, although they leave open the possibility that it might be in India. Ibn Kaṯīr mentions in his tradition that this is the common view. Yet he is not convincing, as he introduces this tradition as a possibility current among the people. Al-Masᶜūdī confirms this (Masᶜūdī 1997, Vol. 1, p. 46).

On the other hand, another tradition was mentioned by more than one authoritative Sunnī Muslim historian and classifier. This tells that Adam was buried in Mecca first, but his body was moved to another place, and he who moved it was Nūḥ. Al-Kisāʾī says (Kisāʾī 1922, Vol. 1, p. 93),

> When he finished his rites of pilgrimage, Nūḥ looked around and saw Adam's grave on the right side of Kaᶜbah, and he asked God to move that grave to his house then in a place in Kufa; Nūḥ returned from his pilgrimage and the ship descended from the air.

This tradition confirms the existence of Adam's grave in Mecca, specifically on the right side of the Kaᶜbah. However, it leaves us room to think about the possibility of the removal of his remains to Kufa.

A further tradition by Ibn Kaṯīr related by Ibn Jarīr says, "In the time of the flood, Nūḥ, peace upon him, carried Adam and Eve in a coffin to *Baytu ãl-Maqdis* (*Jerusalem*). Ibn ᶜAsākir related that Adam's head is at

Abraham's mosque and his legs are at the Rock of Baytu ãl-Maqdis" (Ibn Kaṯīr n.d., Vol. 1, p. 161). Aī-Ṯaᶜlabī mentions the same tradition (Ṯaᶜlabī 1954, p. 60):

> Ibn ᶜAbbās said that during the great flood, Nūḥ carried Adam's coffin in the ship and when he went out of it, he buried Adam in Baytu ãl-Maqdis. Adam died on Friday and Eve lived after his death for another year and was buried with Adam, peace upon him.

As we see, the two traditions agree on the general information that defines the specific place as "Baytu ãl-Maqdis" and the time of burial as after the event of the flood. What concerns us here is the idea of moving the remains or the grave to another place. The Shīᶜīs found a fertile land wherein to build traditions similar in all their details, which they designed through a selective and deliberate process.

What we have seen with regard to Adam's grave and its relation to ᶜAlī's grave applies to the graves of other prophets, chiefly Nūḥ's grave. Al-Ṭabarsī relates that al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, ᶜAlī's sons, during their father's burial in Najaf in Kufa, and during their digging of the grave, found a ready-made grave especially prepared for him from the time of Nūḥ. Al-Ṭabarsī relates (Ṭabarsī 1979, pp. 202–203),

> When he [ᶜAlī] died, we [Ḥasan and Ḥusayn] took him out and we suddenly started to hear some noise and rustling till we arrived at al-Ġariyy. Suddenly we saw a shining rock. We dug and suddenly we found a wooden board of teak wood with the words: "This

is what Nūḥ, peace upon him, preserved for ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him."

Ibn Šahrᵓāšūb says (Ibn Šahrᵓāšūb 1991, Vol. 2, pp. 202–203),

> The grave broke down and a tomb appeared with the Syriac words written on it: "In the name of God, the Most Merciful: this is a grave that Nūḥ dug for ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad's legal guardian, God pray for both of them, seven hundred years before the flood."

What concerns us about the above two traditions is the reference to and connection between ᶜAlī's grave and Nūḥ's grave. ᶜAlī's grave is not an ordinary one, like any other grave; it is a special grave that Nūḥ had dug and prepared seven centuries earlier.

On the esoteric level of these traditions, we see that there are other intentional means of perpetuation, referring specifically to Nūḥ rather than others. Nūḥ is considered one of the stout-hearted people, and is one of the five famous prophets: Nūḥ, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. The Shīᶜīs do not stop here; they elaborate in some of their sources with regard to the nature of the relation between ᶜAlī and Nūḥ. Some sources tell that ᶜAlī was buried in the same place as Nūḥ. Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions two traditions in this regard. The first states that Amīru ãl-Muᵓminīn ᶜAlī, peace upon him, was buried with his father Nūḥ (Ibn Ṭāwūs 1993, Vol. 2, p. 63). The second tradition says (Ibn Ṭāwūs 1993, Vol. 2, p. 83):

> ᶜAlī's grave is in al-Ġariyy between Nūḥ's head and his hairline is behind the dome.

As we see, the two traditions confirm categorically that ᶜAlī's grave exists in Nūḥ's grave.

However, the tradition transmitter Ibn Kaṯīr confirms that Nūḥ's grave exists in Mecca and nowhere else (Ibn Kaṯīr n.d., Vol. 1, p. 189):

> As for his [Nūḥ's] grave, peace upon him, Ibn Jarīr and al-Azraqī related from ᶜAbdu ãl-Raḥmān b. Ṣābiṭ, the non-following: "Nūḥ's grave, peace upon him, is in Masjidu ãl-Ḥarām." This view is more firmly based than the views of later transmitters stating that the grave is in a small town in the al-Biqāᵓ area in southern Lebanon, known today as Karak Nūḥ.
>
> (There is a mosque in this town, called *Karak Nūḥ*, lying north of the town of Zahleh in the Biqāᵓ plain. In this mosque there is a long grave, which is said to be Nūḥ's grave, peace upon him. There were many endowments on it, which have been lost in the course of time.)

Ibn Kaṯīr adds that Nūḥ's grave is more likely to be in the Holy Mosque in Mecca (Ibn Kaṯīr n.d., Vol. 1, p. 190):

> If someone asks if there is any tradition concerning the location of Nūḥ's grave, peace upon him, the answer is "Yes." There is an non-related tradition given by Muḥammad b. Jaᶜfar al-Ṭabarī in his explanation of the Qurᵓānic verse: ***And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth*** (*Q* 2:30). He said, "And it was said: the earth that God mentions in this verse is Mecca."
>
> Al-Ṭabarī continues,

> Abū Ḥumayd related: Jarīr related from ᶜAṭāᵓ b. Ṣābiṭ, whose name is ᶜAbdu āl-Raḥmān, that the Prophet, God's prayers be upon him, said: *The earth of Mecca was spread and the angels circled the Kaᶜbah, and they were the first to circle it. It is the earth to which God called out, "There is a caliph (viceroy) in the land."* The Prophet said: *If his people were destroyed and he and the virtuous survived, he and they will come to it; they will worship God in it till they die. The graves of Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Šuᶜayb are between Zamzam and the Rukn [Corner].*

Clearly Ibn Kaṯīr prefers the view that says that Nūḥ was buried in Mecca, as he tells the traditions told by a companion of the Prophet and ascribed to the Prophet himself. Ibn Kaṯīr also accepts the view that the graves of other prophets besides Nūḥ are present in the earth of holy Mecca. He mentions Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, whose graves are in Najaf or Kufa according to the Shīᶜī belief. However, the Sunnīs argue that the graves are in the Holy Mosque of Mecca. Other sources say they are in Damascus or Yemen.

Al-Ṯaᶜlabī, quoting ᶜAbdu āl-Raḥmān b. Ṣābiṭ (Ṯaᶜlabī 1954, p. 83), mentions that

> Between al-Rukn wa āl-Maqām and Zamzam there are ninety-nine prophets; the graves of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Šuᶜayb, and Ismāᶜīl, peace upon them, are in that spot.

Al-Kisāᵓī gives more weight to another view (Kisāᵓī 1922, Vol. 1, p. 207):

> Hūd and other believers left for Yemen, and he settled there and lived for two whole years there till he died and was buried in Hadramaut.

Ibn Kaṯīr mentions two places and prefers one place as the grave of Hūd, but not of Ṣāliḥ, as does al-Ṯaᶜlabī.

Ibn Kaṯīr deals with this point too (Ibn Kaṯīr n.d., Vol. 1, p. 207):

> It was related that Amīru āl-Muʾminīn mentioned Hūd's qualities, peace upon him, and his grave in the land of Yemen. Others mentioned that it is in Damascus and its mosque. Some people claim that its southern wall is Hūd's grave, peace upon him, and only God knows.

Contrary to all these traditions, others wholly agree that ᶜAlī was buried in Hūd's and Ṣāliḥ's grave, or beside them. In one of his traditions, related by al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī according to his grandfather Abū Ṭālib, Sabzawārī reports (Sabzawārī 1993, p. 72–73):

> I asked al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī, "Where did you bury Amīru āl-Muʾminīn, peace be upon him?" He said: *At the edge of the cliff. We passed by him at night at the mosque of al-Aš*ᶜ*aṯ, and he said: "Bury me beside my brother Hūd."*

This tradition seems strange, and it does not appear in other sources. How can Abū Ṭālib ask al-Ḥasan about the place of burying his son ᶜAlī, while we know that he [Abu

Ṭālib] died years before Hijraẖ in Mecca?[21] However, if we give a second thought to the tradition, we see that ᶜAlī asks his sons to bury him in Najaf of Kufa at a place called al-Ġariyy.

Another tradition mentioned by Majlisī is ascribed to Abū Matir (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 11, p. 379):

> When the dissolute Ibn Muljam, God damn him, struck ᶜAlī, peace upon him, al-Ḥasan asked his father: *Should I kill him?* ᶜAlī said: *No, but imprison him. If I die, kill him, and if I die, bury me in this part, in the grave of my brothers Hūd and Ṣāliḥ.*

We notice that in his tradition Majlisī places Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and ᶜAlī in one grave. He may wish to intimate that the three graves are adjacent in the same place. It is mentioned in more than one source that there is a grave of the prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ in the cemetery of Najaf on the northern side of the respected town. This is a well-known grave and a domed shrine that people visit to receive its blessings (Maḥbūbāẖ 1958, Vol. 1, p. 96).

The Shīᶜī authors concerning *al-mazār* (*visitations*) allocated special chapters that describe the manner of visiting the graves of Hūd, Adam, Nūḥ, and Ṣāliḥ (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 97, p. 251). Besides ᶜAlī's grave there are four others, a visit to which is obligatory for every Shīᶜī after performing the rites of visiting ᶜAlī's grave.

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[21] *Editors' note:* I have not seen the tradition cited from (Sabzawārī 1993), but Majlisī does narrate the exact same tradition on the authority of one ᶜUmar al-Jurjānī (Majlisī 1983, Vol. 42, p. 218;Vol. 100, p. 239). This would seem to make much more sense; perhaps there is a typo or other mistake in Sabzawārī (1993).

Thus, we see how great ᶜAlī's status is for the Shīᶜīs. It seems that, for them, he is even more important than Adam, Nūḥ, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ. The holiness of Najaf resulted first from ᶜAlī's holiness and second from the holiness of the other prophets buried there.

CONCLUSION

According to some sources, ᶜAlī foresaw his murder, its time and place, its manner, and the person who would kill him. However, he did nothing to prevent it because he believed that it was his destiny, decided by God. After his assassination by ᶜAbdu ãl-Raḥmān b. Muljam al-Murādī in 661, his son al-Ḥasan prayed over him and wrapped his body in shrouds. He buried it secretly for fear that the Ḫawārij or Banū Umayyaẖ might dig up the grave.

Several traditions exist about the place of ᶜAlī's burial. One relates that he was buried at aẖ-Ṯawiyyaẖ, but this is a weak tradition. Another says that he was buried at al-Kunāsaẖ, but I do not accept it. A third tradition argues that ᶜAlī was buried at Qaṣru ãl-Imāraẖ in Kufa or at Masjidu ãl-Jamāᶜaẖ in Qaṣru ãl-Imāraẖ. We have shown that this tradition is weak too. A fourth tradition holds that he was buried in Juᶜdaẖ b. Hubayraẖ's house. A fifth tradition mentions that ᶜAlī was buried at Yazīd b. Ḫālid's house. A sixth tradition says that ᶜAlī was buried in Medina, but we have shown that this is far fetched, since the tradition argues that the body was carried from Kufa to Medina, which was a difficult journey in those days. A seventh tradition says that ᶜAlī's body was buried in the land of Ṭayʾ after it was found in a box on the back of a wandering camel. We have shown that this tradition is incorrect.

The commonly accepted view of the Shīᶜīs is that ᶜAlī is buried in Najaf. We tend to accept this view and give it more weight, because it is logical and more reasonable than the others. Besides, more than one narrator and authority support this view, as we have seen.

The Shīᶜī traditions also confirm that ᶜAlī's grave contains the remains of three prophets who were buried in the same grave, namely Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Nūḥ. The Shīᶜīs also believe that the holiness of the land of Najaf stems first from ᶜAlī's sanctity and second from the sanctity of the other prophets who were buried in it. For the Shīᶜīs, Najaf is a holy place comparable to the Kaᶜbah.

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The Necessity of Studying Shīᶜī Commentaries on the Qurʾān

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades there has been a growing interest in the intellectual legacy of Tashayyuᶜ and particularly the contributions of the Shīᶜī Imāms to the field of Qurʾānic studies. There is a virtual lack of serious studies on the intellectual aspects of the Imāms' lives, and especially of Imām ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, a man who was in fact commentator on the Qurʾān, founder of the sciences of *kalām* and *naḥw* (*grammar*); Islāmic art and especially calligraphy; the perfect embodiment of *futuwwah* (*chivalry*); in addition to being the first Muslim and the *political leader* of the Islāmic empire (*ḫalīfaẗu rasūli āllāh.*)

Not only important Shīᶜī commentaries written in previous centuries, but many books written by prominent contemporary scholars are not accessible to Western readers and have remained unknown in the West. There is an urgent need to introduce this branch of the Shīᶜī sciences to Western readers through further research and translation as well as production of reference works and anthologies. The available resources on the Shīᶜī *tafsīr* are numerous and extremely rich in Arabic and Persian. There are a large

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and the Imāms of the Ahlulbayt. Some aspects of this treatise bring to mind the question of the influence of Sufism upon Mullā Muḥsin's thought. While the question of the relationship between Shīᶜī mysticism and Sufism is not directly addressed, it is an area that deserves serious research. It is too often taken for granted in conventional wisdom that Shīᶜī mysticism and Sufism are complementary, if not identical. Recent research, however, indicates that pure Shīᶜī mysticism is quite different in many important respects from the Sufi way. We hope to feature research in the International Journal of Shīᶜī Studies on this issue of fundamental importance.

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Idris Samawi Hamid

A Sacred Conception of Justice: The Letter of Imam ᶜAlī to Mālik al-Aštar

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In this article we shall be reflecting upon the theme of justice in relation to the sacred principles that determine the worldview of Imam ᶜAlī in general, and in the context of the letter written by the Imam to Mālik al-Aštar, appointing him as governor of Egypt, in particular. The most general definition given by the Imam of justice is this: *Justice puts everything in its right place.* What relates this broad definition of justice to the sacred is that the first and most important *thing* to be put in its right place is one's relationship with God; everything else is derived from this spiritual imperative. This order of precedence is clearly established in the following important statement in the Imam's letter to Mālik: *Be just with God and be just with people [giving them what is their due] from yourself.* Now being just with God means, among other things, conforming as best as one can to His own Nature, which is not only the source of justice but is justice, (as it comprises and is all positive qualities): *I bear witness*, the Imam says in one of his sermons, *that He is Justice (ᶜadl) and He acts justly.* Applied to state and society, then, one of the most obvious

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consequences of this conception of justice is the necessity of piety and rectitude on the part of the rulers. As the Imam says in another of his sermons:

> *The most momentous of the reciprocal rights that God has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the subjects, and the right of the subjects over the ruler – a reciprocal obligation which God has ordained, each upon the other.*

He then makes the following point, which is altogether indispensable for any discourse on good governance in Islam:

> *The subjects will not be righteous except through the righteousness of the rulers, and the rulers will not be righteous except through the uprightness of the subjects. So if the subjects render to the ruler his rightful due, and he renders to them theirs, then will Right be honored amongst them, the ways of religion will be upheld, and the banners of justice will be erected...*

One of the main intentions of this essay is to reflect upon the ways in which the Imam tries to ensure that the ruler remains righteous and just; and, as will be clear from what follows, this involves much more than a simple exhortation to abide by the formal rules of Islamic Law.

The letter, it must be remembered, is addressed to a prominent Muslim, one of the Imam's closest and most trusted companions; so while the principles underlying his positive instructions on governance are evidently of universal import, his warnings as regards injustice and oppression, in addition to expressing a universal theme, ought to be understood in a very precise way: they are applicable to all

those who, while formally subject to Islam and its laws, are nonetheless vulnerable to the temptations offered by political power, taking full cognisance of the unfortunate but proven truth expressed by the maxim, "power corrupts." The letter, then, can be seen as addressing not only those who wish to rule according to just principles, but also all those who, while not being already corrupt, are nonetheless corruptible, even if they have all the right intentions at the outset of any political career. This theme is thus relevant universally, for the Imam's pronouncements are not restricted to the Islamic framework, nor to the particularities of his socio-political context; rather, his thoughts and ideas lay the foundations for what we might call a "spirituality of political ethics", and are therefore relevant in any context where principles of morality and modes of governance are evaluated in the light of spirituality.

Justice is a multifaceted principle, having ramifications in diverse fields – philosophical, legal, political, social, economic; and we do not pretend to offer any comprehensive discussion of all these aspects here. Rather, our concern, in the fist part of the essay, is with a particular dimension of justice, one which is political on the surface, ethical in its outward expression, but spiritual in depth: that is, we shall be addressing the question of justice on the part of a political ruler, justice conceived in relation to its more clearly definable diametrical opposite – injustice, tyranny, oppression and corruption. In our discussion of the famous letter of the Imam our chief aim is to explore the nature of the spiritual dynamics underlying the tension between justice and injustice within the soul of the ruler, and, by extension, within the soul as such. This leads into the second part of the essay, where it will be argued that the Imam's conception of justice, being rooted in an immutable spiritual

orientation towards the divine reality, bestows an existential power upon the moral effort to live according to just precepts, a power that is lacking when justice is conceived exclusively in terms of individual or horizontal values, that is, according to a secular "moral philosophy" divorced from religious principles. The crucial role played by devotion and worship – formal and supra-formal – is revealed in this discussion as the linchpin of the authentic spiritual life from which integral virtue flows spontaneously. This point will be made clearer by means of a brief comparison with Plato's "gazing" on the Sovereign Good, the source of all virtue.

I

The letter of the Imam begins with a note of somber realism, setting in context the preamble which stresses the importance of abiding by God's *wājibāt*, the religious obligations binding on every Muslim. Mālik is told to prefer obedience to God over all things, *to abide by what He has commanded in His Book... for no one prospers except through abiding by them, and no one is wretched except through repudiating and neglecting them.* This preamble is introductory but by no means perfunctory: obedience to the Divine commands is not only to be seen, extrinsically, as legally binding, it is to be understood, intrinsically, as spiritually liberating. For this obedience plays a crucial part in liberating one from the tyranny of the *soul which incites to evil* (*al-nafs al-ammārah bi-āl-sū'*), to which the Imam refers, immediately after calling Mālik to obedience: *For truly the human self incites to evil, unless God has mercy.* This sentence is almost identical to the words of the Prophet Joseph in Q 12:53, and is of the utmost importance in setting the context within which the ethical injunctions and socio-political instructions to come are to be grasped aright.

For the essential relationship that determines the spiritual substance of the soul, and a fortiori, its moral comportment, is the relationship between the human soul and divine grace – the soul which, left to its own inclinations, tends towards evil; and divine grace which, called upon with trust and fervor, liberates the soul from this tendency towards evil and bestows upon it instead an interiorizing quality, a quality which leads the soul back to its true, primordial nature, its *fiṭrah*.

The actual state of fallen human nature, then, is to give way to the ideal state of original human nature, an ideal state which is both origin and end of the human condition, but also the true substance of every human soul, and is thus always accessible in principle, even if, for the majority, it remains clouded by fallen human nature in practice. From this integral human nature, in complete harmony with the divine nature, all the essential virtues flow spontaneously and unhindered. *Let your most beloved treasure be the treasure of virtuous acts*, the Imam writes; now virtue will indeed be the dearest treasure for one who reverses the natural inclinations of the outward soul and establishes a supernatural orientation towards the deeper nature of the soul, and, by that very token, towards the divine reality that furnishes the ontological foundations of all authentic virtue. The relationship between human virtue and divine reality is to be understood in the Imam's perspective as altogether indispensable: on the one hand – in subjective terms – the practice of virtue attracts the corresponding divine quality; and on the other hand – in objective terms – the divine quality is the true substance of all human virtue. In other words, the individual must participate in and embody the very qualities he wishes God to manifest towards him; and his effort to do so is empowered in the measure that

he grasps – through intuition and contemplation, rather than simply rationally and theoretically – these same divine qualities.

It is worthwhile dwelling a little on the notion of the soul which incites to evil, and on the Qurʾānic story of Joseph within which this notion arises; for knowledge of this context would have been assumed by the Imam when he wrote this sentence, and he clearly intended that it be borne in mind by Mālik and, by extension, any person reading this letter on governance. Joseph gives this description of man's base inclinations after his innocence of all charges had been proven in the presence of the King. He says, though, I do not exonerate myself, this being explained by what comes next: Truly the soul incites to evil, unless God has mercy. Indeed, on the two occasions when he was subjected to the seductive temptations of Zulayḫah̃, it is made clear in the Qurʾān that his successful resistance to her wiles was due not to his own moral and volitive resources but to the grace of God. At the first attempted seduction, this grace is implicitly present, through Joseph's "vision" of the "evidence" of his Lord. We read:

> ***She desired him and he would have desired her, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord; thus it was, so that We might turn away from him evil and lewdness.*** (Q 12:24)

At the second attempt, when it was not just Zulayḫah̃ but also her invited guests who were trying to seduce him, the indispensability of God's grace is more explicitly articulated, by Joseph himself, when he makes the following utterance:

> *O my Lord!... unless You turn away their snare from me, I would feel inclined towards them...* (Q 12:33)

This theme of human helplessness in the face of attractive but immoral gratification should be seen as heavily implied in the Imam's repetition of the Qur'ānic sentence, ***Truly the soul incites to evil, unless God has mercy.*** These then are the two poles of attraction for the soul: its own base inclinations towards negative possibilities within the fleeting world of appearances; and the grace of God, attracting the soul back towards the pure positivity of ultimate reality. The very acuteness of the contrast contained within this powerful Qur'ānic sentence galvanizes an awareness of the soul's absolute and unconditional need of God in all circumstances; it is thus a most fitting way to begin a letter of instruction to one who is being vested with authority over a vast and wealthy country where temptations aplenty lie in wait. It stands as a somber reminder of the soul's susceptibility to seduction on all planes, gross and subtle, a susceptibility which can be neutralized and overcome, not by the soul itself, but only by the mercy and grace of God.

The manner in which this grace is brought into the soul as a determinative element of moral and spiritual life will be made clearer later on in the letter; but, for now, the negative side of the question needs further elaboration. For the ever-present temptation, on the part of the ruler, to abuse his power and to perpetrate injustice and tyranny needs to be given more than a passing reference. It might be argued that this negative aspect – how to refrain from injustice – is much more difficult and subtle a problem than its positive counterpart – how to act with justice. The Imam's letter gives detailed instruction on how to

deal justly with the different classes of society, the different executive and administrative grades of government, the army, judiciary, and so on; and much of this is common sense, based on straightforward principles of honesty and fairness. The instructions take on a more nuanced quality, however, by virtue of the Imam's penetrating perceptions of different types of individual and classes of society; and the tone is raised to a higher pitch by the metaphysical observations that punctuate the text, making this much more than just a political document. The theoretical rules of political governance themselves, then, are posited in a direct and straightforward manner; but what is not so straightforward is the actual ability, on the part of any holder of political office, to maintain fidelity to these rules when confronted with the temptations offered by power; one might frame laws for punishing corruption, in other words, but what cannot be legislated is the will or the capacity to remain incorruptible in the face of the blandishments of political authority. This helps explain why the Imam's exhortations take on such a negative quality in the early part of the letter; for example, in the command to *break the soul in the face of passionate desires*, to *dominate your inclination*, to *withhold yourself from that which is not lawful for you*. It also explains why the ethical imperative of justice must be placed firmly within the context of a lived spirituality, failing which the injunctions to be fair, just and honest will lack that existential quality that transforms such injunctions from abstract postulates into concrete realities.

On a more positive note, a life of authentic spirituality entails living on the mercy of God, in hope and trust; thus, concomitantly, one must extend mercy and compassion to one's fellow human beings. The capacity to act with compassion in no way conflicts with the demands of justice; rather,

it is an intrinsic aspect of justice, conceived ontologically; to act with compassion accords with acting with justice not only in the sense of putting things in their right place – one must extend compassion wherever one can, without overlooking the necessity of condign punishment, where this is unavoidable; compassion also and above all else conforms to justice in being at one with the true nature of things. Put differently, the capacity to act with compassion stems not so much from personal sentiment as from an innate affinity with the very nature of divine reality, that higher reality in which, as the Qur'ān tells us, ***My mercy encompasses all things*** (*Q* 7:156); a reality in which thy Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy; a reality whose essential character is determined by the principle *My mercy takes precedence over My wrath.*

The wrathful side of the nature of things is not denied here, but it is clearly subordinated to the higher ontological principle of mercy; there is, in other words, no common measure between the relativities that are subject, accidentally, to wrath and punishment, and the realities, intrinsically beatific, to which mercy and compassion give access. One is therefore more *real* insofar as mercy predominates over wrath within one's own soul, and it is in the very nature of justice, conceived in this sacred manner, to tend towards compassion wherever possible, even though, as is made clear later in the letter, there must also be a place for rigorous application of corrective penalty where this is unavoidable. In the following extract, this stress on mercy comes in the context of a remarkable statement of the unity of the human race, and stands forth as a corrective to all forms of prejudice, particularism and communitarianism that would apply justice or compassion only to members of one's own "group" however defined:

> *Infuse your heart with mercy for the subjects, love for them, and kindness towards them. Be not like a ravenous beast of prey above them, seeking to devour them. For they are of two types: either your brother in religion or your like in creation. Mistakes slip from them, defects are manifest by them, deliberately or accidentally. So bestow upon them your forgiveness and your pardon, just as you would have God bestow upon you His forgiveness and pardon; for you are above them, and the one who appointed you as governor is above you, and God is above him who appointed you... and through them He tests you.*

The universal applicability of compassion is here allied to a reminder of the absolute sovereignty of God: no man – whether the governor or the ruler appointing the governor – is anything but a slave of God, utterly dependent upon His mercy. Thus, each person who finds himself in a position of relative superiority over others must constantly remember his own inferiority vis-à-vis the Absolute, and this awareness both leads to compassion on his part towards those beneath him, and attracts to himself the compassion of God above him.

The final sentence of the excerpt, warning the governor that he should see his power over his subjects not simply as a privilege, but more as a trial from God, clearly expresses the Imam's own attitude to rulership, an attitude that is observable in the famous sermon *al-Šiqšiqiyyah*. In this sermon, the Imam expresses his reluctance to rule, despite his knowledge that he was indeed the most appropriate person to do so. In this, we see a striking exemplification of Plato's ideal attitude to power, that possessed by the true

philosopher, he who acts as ruler only for the sake of the people,

> *...not regarding it as a distinction, but as an unavoidable task... caring only for the right and the honors to be gained from that, and above all for justice as the one indispensable thing in whose service and maintenance they will reorganize their own state.*

After the warning noted above, the Imam continues with another:

> *Do not set your soul up for war with God.*

One might well ask what this means, what kind of actions or attitudes put the soul at war with God. It seems that the Imam is alluding to something rather more subtle than simply disobedience to God, manifested as so many violations of the religious obligations mentioned at the outset of the letter. While this is the most obvious meaning of fighting against God, it does not exclude more subtle modes of opposition to divine reality, that is, inward attitudes that may be accompanied by outward acts of obedience, but which contradict the spirit of those acts; such acts thereby being rendered hypocritical.

One can take for example the vice of pride (*takabbur*): the ruler's pride constitutes a misappropriation of a divine quality, an arrogation to oneself of a greatness that belongs exclusively to God, He alone having the right to the quality of *takabbur*, He alone can be called, without insult, *al-Mutakabbir*. Vaunting oneself before people is tantamount to inwardly opposing the authority of God, and is thus an implicit denial of His unique and incomparable majesty; this

denial of a concomitant of God's sovereignty can in turn be seen as a kind of *war* with God. In other words, enmity with the transcendent reality is the invisible substance that pervades any pride or any act of arrogance or oppression by a ruler towards those beneath him.

The paradox here, one that only a sense of spiritual values can reveal, is that an attitude of superiority towards those who are *below* is in fact an attitude of rebellion towards that which is *above*. Hence an injustice towards creatures not only brings down upon its perpetrator the justice of the Creator, it also in and of itself manifests outright opposition to the Creator. Thus, an apparently *horizontal vice* – horizontal in the sense of relating to this world – is in reality a *spiritual disorder*, the outward immorality of oppression being but the symptom of an inner spiritual malaise, an implicit denial of the absoluteness – hence uniqueness – of the source of all power and authority, a forgetfulness of the reality expressed by the Qurʾānic verse:

> ***To whom belongs the Dominion this day? To God, the One, the All-Conquering.*** (*Q* 40:16)

The truth expressed by this verse should resound constantly in the ears of all rulers, where ***this day*** is understood as "every day," and not just the Day of Judgement.

The Imam expresses succinctly the train of thought that is set in motion within the mind of a ruler who is stepping on the slippery slope towards oppression:

> *Do not say, "I have been given authority, I order and am obeyed," for such [an attitude leads to] corruption in the heart, and the erosion of religion.*

It should be noted that the beginning of unwarranted self-esteem is seen as leading first to inner corruption and then to corruption of the religion, this order of causality highlighting the fact that outward prescriptions of religion require the right inward attitude if they are to be applied with integrity, and if they are to be maintained with stability. We might restate the Imam's idea thus: When power goes to the head, faith departs from the heart; and conversely, for faith to be properly manifested in the world, it must flow from a heart suffused with humility.

The Imam continues:

> *If the authority of your position engenders vanity and arrogance, then look at the grandeur of God's dominion above you... this will calm your ambition, restrain you from your own vehemence, and restore to you what had strayed from your intellect.*

The relationship between the intellect and humility should be carefully noted here: the part of the intellect that 'strays" when vanity and arrogance enter is precisely the part that is conscious of the absolute reality of God and the illusory character of everything else; it is significant that the word for 'arrogance', '*maḫīlah*', is derived from the same root as the word for imagination, *ḫayāl*, and is thus intimately connected with the realm of the imaginary, the fanciful, the illusory and the unreal. Arrogant pride is therefore an intense form of self-delusion, stemming from an intellectual defect; it manifests as a vice, but its cause goes deeper than the level of morality, and involves an over-estimation of oneself together with an under-estimation of the Absolute. In this light, the overt egotism of the tyrant can be seen as an intensification of the congenital egocentricity that

accompanies every person who has not realized the truth of the sole reality of God and the illusory nature of all else. The sage alone knows the full truth of ***Every thing is perishing except His countenance*** (*Q* 55:26–27); and only the sage draws from this truth the humility that dissolves all individualism and egocentricity – the roots of pride, vanity and arrogance that, in turn, are the life-blood of tyranny and oppression.

One can now better appreciate the Imam's warning:

> *Beware of comparing [yourself] with God in greatness and likening [yourself] to Him in might, for God abases every tyrant and disgraces every braggart.*

One who does not act with justice towards God and His creatures, and instead tyrannizes them, will find that not only His creatures, but also God Himself will be his opponent:

> *He remains at war with God until he desists and repents.*

We understand this last point to mean the following: eventually, the tyrant will be forced to repent, even if this be only at the point of death and imminent judgement. Even if the tyrant appears to have successfully evaded the consequences of his tyranny in this life, he cannot evade them in the Hereafter. But as regards the nature of this *war* he has with God – that is, his implicit opposition to ultimate reality, his violation of the deepest nature of things – this war takes various forms. One form of the war is constituted by the very persistence of tyranny on the part of the tyrant, for the longer the tyranny goes on, the more wretched becomes the soul of the tyrant, the more firmly are the seeds

of misery planted in his being, whence the Qur'ānic doctrine of *istidrāj* – the drawing out of punishment by degrees:

> ***Of those We have created are people who guide with truth and dispense justice therewith. But those who reject Our signs, We will lead them on by degrees [to punishment] from whence they know not.*** (*Q* 7:181–2)

Another form taken by enmity with God is the inner war with one's own conscience. The voice of conscience – the very essence and sum total of secular ethics – can here be grasped in its plenary context, rather than simply as the somewhat emaciated (more precisely, hypertrophied) foundation of individual morality to which it has been reduced in secular ethical discourse. This fuller context is the supra-individual or metaphysical source of individual conscience, the divine infusion of spiritual discernment within the soul; this infusion or inspiration serves as the ontological foundation of ethical discrimination – the divine music of essential reality is translated, at the level of the morally responsible soul, into the voice of inner conscience:

> ***And the soul and That which perfected it, inspiring it with [consciousness of] its wickedness and its righteousness.*** (*Q* 91:7–8)

The war against one's conscience – even if it be barely acknowledged by the oppressor – is in fact, and a fortiori, a war against God. At a deeper ontological level this war against God emerges with clarity as a war against the very reality that defines the soul as such, for the soul not only contains a moral conscience – an intrinsic and inalienable awareness of the difference between good and evil which has

been instilled within it by God; it also contains an innate consciousness of the reality of the lordship of the divine, together with the corresponding slavery of the creature. The profound consciousness, or primordial intuition, of this reality can be expressed in more metaphysical and less personalistic terms as the sense of the absoluteness of divine reality and the relativity of everything other than this reality. The Qurʾān describes the immanence of this spiritual consciousness within each soul in terms which emphasize its supra- or pre-personal nature; it does this by describing the degree of consciousness in question in terms of a moment at the very dawn of creation, thus preceding the human condition as such, but forming part of the creative articulation of the human soul:

> ***And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify against their souls [saying], Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, verily, we testify. [This was] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection: Truly, of this we were unaware.*** (*Q* 7:172)

We see here that the source of morality transcends the human level, even while entering into the very definition of humanity. From this perspective, that which renders the human soul fully human is, precisely, the element of transcendence that goes infinitely beyond the soul, and yet mysteriously furnishes its own deepest being. In this light, the notions of tyranny and oppression take on a much more nuanced meaning, these vices being brought much closer to the lived reality of all souls, rather than being simply restricted to those possessing – and abusing

– political power: the tyrant is he who violates, first and foremost, his own soul, allowing it to be dominated by the *nafs ammārah*. Thus, the statement given by the Imam as epitomizing the attitude of one on his way to corrupting his own soul and becoming an oppressor – "I order and am obeyed" – is not just to be understood socially but also interpreted microcosmically. It thereby becomes the statement of the evil part of the soul, the *nafs ammārah* which, literally "orders" (*amara*) and is obeyed by the other elements of the soul, the intelligence, imagination, will, sentiment, sensibility, and so on. This commanding or ordering soul which arrogates to itself the right of autonomy and dominion is described succinctly by the Qur'ānic verse:

> ***Truly man is rebellious, in that he deems himself independent.*** (*Q* 96:6)

Insofar as the soul detaches itself from total dependence upon God, it sets itself up as a god in its own right, and herein lies the true description of the tyrant, Have you seen him who takes his own desire as his god? Knowledge of one's nothingness before God, and of one's consequent unconditional need for God is the only way of loosening the grip of the hold of the soul which commands to evil; for only that soul which already commands itself to evil commands others to evil, and only the soul which is lowly before God will be humble, compassionate and just in its dealings with people.

This principle emerges from the Imam's injunction, mentioned above, *Be fair with God and be fair with people in respect of your soul...* It also emerges from the following words of the Imam:

> *And let the most beloved of affairs to you be those most centered upon the truth, the most comprehensive in justice, the most inclusive of popular approval, for the disapproval of the common folk undermines the approval of the elite...*

This stress on the importance of the common people is not only sound practical advice for the smooth and fair administration of the state; it can also be seen as reflecting the spiritual imperative of realizing the actual lowliness of man in relation to God, and thus as a way of encouraging the ruler to identify with the poor, rather than the rich, on the principle: ***People, you are the poor in relation to God, and God, He is the Rich, the Owner of Praise*** (Q 35:15).

II

We now come, in the Imam's letter, to a point of extreme subtlety which can all too easily be overlooked, given the conciseness with which it is expressed, and given the fact that its logical concomitant is not explicitly stated by the Imam here. It comes when he is instructing Mālik on the kinds of advisers he should have close to him. He tells him to avoid misers and cowards, adding

> *Truly, miserliness and cowardice and avarice are so many diverse inclinations which a bad opinion of God brings together.*

The notion of a *bad opinion* of God (*sūʾu āl-ẓann*) is another way of expressing the idea of a misunderstanding of the divine nature, arising out of a series of misconceptions of the qualities of God. From this point of view, all human

vices arise out of an intellectual dysfunction, which in turn is the consequence of weak faith. The converse of this follows logically: a strong and deep faith generates a *good opinion* of God – an accurate intellectual perception of the divine qualities – and this good opinion in turn ensures that the soul will be *im-pressed* by the divine qualities. These qualities must be understood not only as unattainable transcendent realities, absolutely one with the divine essence and thus utterly beyond the purview of the human soul; they are also to be grasped as archetypes, models, exemplars, patterns or perfections for the soul to emulate in the measure of his or her possibilities.

This is the very opposite, it should be noted, of *comparing oneself with God in greatness*: one must be as much *like* God as possible, but in the unalterable context of one's slavery to Him. In other words, one must be generous, for God is *al-Karīm*; kind, for He is *al-Laṭīf*, and so on. But one must also be humble, even if there is no divine quality that can be posited as the exemplar of this virtue. All such virtues as humility, lowliness and effacement, are modes of expressing the essential dependence of man upon God, or as manifesting the incommensurability between the relative and the Absolute. Thus, as between the human and the divine, there is both positive and inverse analogy: in terms of the first, *He who shows not mercy will not have mercy shown to him*[1]; and in terms of the second, ***You are the poor, and God, He is the Rich*** (*Q* 35:15). There must therefore be a synthesis between the active human virtues – the positive reflections of the divine qualities – and the spiritual consciousness of one's nothingness before the divine reality – the inverted reflection, on the human plane,

[1] A *ḥadīṯ*.

of the divine transcendence; it is this synthesis that bestows spiritual impetus upon moral effort.

After having written about which type of advisers the ruler should have, the Imam proceeds with a description of the different classes of people within society: the army, the scribes, the judiciary, executive officers, tax-collectors, merchants and artisans, and, finally, the destitute – each of which have rights and duties. A detailed analysis of his descriptions and recommendations regarding each of these classes is beyond the scope of this article; for our purposes, it suffices to focus upon his advice regarding the poorest classes. He tells Mālik to pay special attention to those who have no resources at all – the destitute, the crippled, the orphans, the elderly – beginning his instruction *Allah, Allah* to stress its urgency; they are *most in need of justice from you* and should be treated in a manner such that *God may excuse you on the day you meet Him.* All of these, and others who are in need, but refuse to beg, should be helped by the governor, and he should appoint an officer with the specific task of bring the needs of the most destitute to light and to provide for them. Then he adds the following crucial words:

> *This is onerous for the governors, and [the fulfilment of] all rights is onerous, but God makes it light for those who aspire to the Hereafter, who restrain their souls in patience, and trust in the truth of that which is promised them by God.*

Again, what needs to be highlighted here is that the spiritual element is what makes practicable an ideal that otherwise would be a heavy burden; the divine assistance is assured for those whose attention is not confined to this world alone,

but whose aspirations extend beyond it to the Hereafter. Paradoxically, it is only when this world is seen through to the next, that a fully just attitude towards it emerges. Those, on the other hand, whose *ṭalab*, or aspiration, does not go beyond this world will be more likely to fall prey to the easy option of neglecting the destitute – for, in the horizontal scales of political evaluation, the costs to the ruler in pursuing a policy of charity towards the poverty-stricken may outweigh the benefits to him. This is where an ethical policy tied to a this-worldly appraisal, to pragmatic politics or to personal interest, reveals its inherent flaws: but when the notion of right in regard to the poor is impregnated with that aspiration for the Hereafter, together with firm faith in God's inexorable justice and infinite compassion, an attitude of unflinching fidelity to the needs of the destitute in society will be generated ever anew.

Such an attitude, which goes far beyond the conventional notions of charity or generosity, will not be susceptible to any contrary suggestion stemming from pragmatism or individualism, and still less from indifference or wilfulness. With this attitude firmly in place, the next quality mentioned by the Imam, that of patience, flows naturally. For, in the light of a concrete and not merely notional presentiment of the absolute values in question, patience can be indefinitely extended, no longer dependent on personal will alone, but sustained by the empowering grace that flows from heartfelt faith.

The Imam finishes the above point with reference to those with the right aspirations having, as a consequence, confidence in the truth of God's promise: if the promise of God's justice and His compassion be true, then the governor's effort to extend mercy to and to deal justly with the poor will, again, be immeasurably but palpably relieved, the

burden of having to help those who are weak and helpless – and from assisting whom, no political benefit is derived – this burden is transformed into an inescapable duty concomitant upon one's spiritual conviction, the certitude that not only is such charity something good, right and proper, but that this goodness, rectitude and propriety are in harmony with the true and inalienable substance of ultimate reality. These aspects of spiritual reality are veiled from worldly rulers by their covert prejudices, at best, and their overt vices, at worst. Such rulers are oblivious not only to the truth of God's promise, relating to ultimate felicity, but also to His warnings and threats of punishment. It cannot be denied that the notion of the Hereafter, containing the consequences, beatific or wretched, of human action, figures prominently in the Imam's spiritual conception of ethics in general and justice in particular. But there is a deeper side to this seemingly simple affirmation of the ethical impact of divine threats and promises on human action.

The Imam frequently echoes, at least implicitly, the Qur'ānic principle that the Hereafter is ***better and more lasting*** (Q 87:17). The Hereafter is not only the *time* when divine threats and promises are consummated: it is also the *space* within which all positive qualities – spiritual, angelic, divine – are manifested in their plenary nature, those qualities that are glimpsed on earth as reflections of the higher realities. The Qur'ān, more so than any other scripture, it should be noted, affords to the imagination numerous and complex descriptions of paradisal bliss; one of the key functions of which is alluded to in the Qur'ān itself: the mere thought of Paradise is itself a purification of the mind and heart, a means of averting from the soul the ever-present temptation to seek its ultimate happiness and well-being in this world alone. On the contrary, one's

well-being will lie in the performance of good deeds in this world, in the measure that one fully believes that ***whatever good you send before for your souls, you will find it with God, better and more tremendous as reward*** (*Q* 73:20) .

Thus, a profound orientation towards the Hereafter translates itself into a perception of its beatitude already in the herebelow, in the form, precisely, of those acts and attitudes which, being good, are of one and the same ontological substance as that felicity to which they lead; in this light, morally good actions and noble intentions are grasped, by one who sees beyond the veil of this world, as concrete spiritual prefigurations of heavenly realities, and not just as ethical prerequisites for salvation. Goodness, in other words, does not just lead to a heavenly reward: it already is something of this reward: ***Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?*** (*Q* 55:60)

These considerations can be elaborated further by bringing in the altogether crucial issue of *intention.* Even if the effort of the just man to live according to justice is frustrated by the imponderables of terrestrial life, nonetheless, the right intentions that motivate him, together with his awareness of the immutable divine qualities as models or principles guiding his endeavor, produce a real inward *taste* of the grace that is the spiritual foundation of his moral life. If God's promise is true, then the impact of that truth on the soul of the sincere believer transforms a personal ethic into an incontrovertible reality, a desirable value into an unconditional imperative; morality is thus deepened by (and into) spirituality, an existential and all-encompassing mode of being within which the burden of individual *duty* is not only lightened immeasurably, it is transformed into a fruit of one's *taste* of spiritual reality: one then acts justly out of

a sense of gratitude for what one has already received and not only out of hope for something as yet unattained.

Furthermore, the just man is liberated from the material consequences of his actions in the measure of the rectitude and sincerity of his intentions; actions being evaluated in this perspective not according to consequences but intentions. One's intention is to be just, not for the sake of some earthly reward, or some tangible consequence in the world, but purely for the sake of justice itself, and this essence or principle of justice is in turn inseparable from the divine nature. For justice is at one with God not simply because that which God commands is just: rather, God commands just acts precisely because they are just, and because this justice is one with His own nature, as we noted at the outset: *I bear witness that He is Justice and He acts justly.* If God acts justly as a result of His very nature which is pure justice, the spiritual man will act justly out of a desire to conform to God's nature, and not simply out of obedience to God's commands, and never out of desire for any earthly reward. As the Qur'ān says:

> ***The most pious will be far removed from it [the punishment of Hell], he who gives of his wealth to purify himself; and nobody possesses, in the sight of such a person, any favor that might be bestowed on him as reward [for his generosity] – [His action is performed] only seeking only the Countenance of his transcendent Lord, and he will be content.*** (*Q* 92:17–21)

In the very measure that good action is performed for the sake of that absolute goodness which God is, the performer of the action is imperturbably content, untouched by the

blame or praise of others; and neither deflated or dejected by any outward adversity that thwarts his good actions, nor inflated or elated by the successful consequences of his good actions.

Again, one observes the difference between a secular ethic of justice and a spiritual conception of justice: whereas a secular ethic stands or falls according to the degree of success in realizing outwardly its ideal of justice, a spiritual conception already sees the fulfilment of its ideal in the sincere intention to be just. Now while this may seem on the surface to condone the failure to achieve justice in society, and thus easily exploitable as a subterfuge by which actual injustice is legitimated – through an appeal to good but thwarted intentions – the very opposite is in fact the case: for the fulfilment of a spiritual ideal of justice essentially requires an unyielding struggle to achieve it – failing which the intention is shown to be lacking sincerity. To hold an intention with sincerity essentially implies striving diligently in pursuit of its realization. Thus, however formidable the obstacles, however compelling the arguments of pragmatism may be, however much one's strenuous efforts are brought to nothing due to unavoidable exigencies of outward life, the just man never despairs, he never abandons the effort to achieve justice, precisely because the achievement of justice in this world is not the sum total of his aims; because he feels that the intention is already, in an invisible but spiritually palpable way, its own fulfilment; and he knows, with a sense of sober realism, that the outward realization of his intention depends upon circumstances beyond his control, and, ultimately, on the grace of God.

So, far from implying any lack of resolve on the part of one motivated by a sacred conception of justice, the efforts of such a person will, on the contrary, be as ceaseless

and unyielding as the reward in which he fervently believes is eternal and unfailing; they will also be sustained by the consciousness of the subtle continuity between just intentions and the divine quality of justice, and thereby the divine nature itself. An inalienable sense of the sacred, then, sustains the just man in his pursuit of justice. The secular ideal, on the other hand, is all too susceptible to disintegrate under pressure, because of its quasi-absolute dependence upon two relativities: the relativity of the individual soul, susceptible to a range of comprising factors, outward and inward; and the relativity of the outward world itself, to which the secular ideal is inextricably tied and by which its validity will be judged. Personal idealism, in other words, hangs by the thread of social contingency, when justice is conceived in a secular framework; in a sacred conception of justice, on the other hand, divine grace supports the incorruptible ideal of justice, which is thus held high above the frailties and vicissitudes to which the human soul and human society are both subject. To prove this point, one only has to recall the nature of the Imam's caliphate: a continuous series of bloody conflicts, against foes that professed Islam, prevented him outwardly from putting into effect many of the principles and policies that flowed from his conception of sacred truth and justice – but none of this resulted in dejection, despair or cynicism, or in even a slight diminution in his efforts to achieve justice whenever and wherever possible, as is amply demonstrated in the nature of his own administration, and in the stream of letters and counsels to his supporters and governors, including the letter we are currently studying.

While for the just man, every effort undertaken for the sake of justice is already constitutive of its own reward, the inverse will hold for the unjust man: every act of

tyranny already constitutes, in and of itself, something of the punishment that it will, ineluctably call forth. For the reality of the act lies in the nature of its consummation, so every sin is already a form of punishment. The tyrant may believe that he has evaded the consequences of his tyranny through cunning machinations, but the effect of these machinations is only to further entrench the soul in the delusive belief that sin pays and that virtue does not – a delusion which keeps the tyrant at *war with God*, as it was put earlier.

III

We now come to what is arguably the linchpin of the entire epistle, the means by which the sacred substance of all the virtues is assimilated by the ruler, namely, prayer. After stressing the need to perform all tasks in their appropriate times, the Imam instructs Mālik to set apart the *most excellent* of his available time for *what is between you and God*, that is, acts of worship and devotion. Mālik is urged to pay special attention to the obligatory prayers as the means by which he purifies his religion for God, or renders sincere his devotion to God. Now this instruction is not to be taken only as an exhortation to perform the formal prayers; it must also, and above all, be understood in the light of the deeper meaning of 'purifying one's religion for God', that is, purifying the substance of the relationship between the soul and God; for it is the depth of this relationship that will determine the quality of all human virtue. As the Imam says elsewhere: *Remember that every act of yours is dependent upon your prayer.* It is not simply the mechanical performance of the prayer that matters, but the inward quality that accompanies it and enlivens it from within. The

intensity, frequency and sincerity of prayer are essential to its efficacy. The Imam continues:

> *Give unto God of your body [i.e. your vital energy] in your nights and your days, and perform fully that by which you draw near to God, doing so perfectly, without [this means] becoming dull or deficient, however much your body may weary.*

All the stress here should be on the word *taqarrub* or *drawing near*: one attains the divine nearness most directly through deep devotion, offered up alone, in the dead of the night, with all one's heart. This nearness being realized, all of one's other actions in the world have bestowed upon them something of the spiritual quality gained through the divine proximity. Thus can all action be assimilated to *devotion* in this wider sense, all outward actions being truly governed by the sincere intention to give oneself to God. Hence, as the Imam said, just after telling Mālik to set apart the best of his times for God, *though all times [and actions performed therein] are for God if the intention underlying them is good, and your subjects derive security therefrom.*

In other words, all the actions of the ruler will partake of the sacred, in the measure that his devotion truly enters into the source of the sacred. Then one can envisage an overflow, as it were, from the fountain of formal and supererogatory prayer, into the outward domain of action. This subtle truth is beautifully expressed in the famous *ḥadīṯ qudsī*, often referred to as the *Ḥadīṯ of Taqarrub*:

> *My slave draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My slave never ceases to draw near to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love,*

> *I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks.*

To thus see and act through God can be understood to mean *seeing things as they really are*, and then acting upon that vision; in other words, it implies perfect justice, putting each thing in its place. It is important to note in the above *ḥadīṯ qudsī* the distinction between the obligatory and the supererogatory acts of devotion – both are means of "drawing near" but it is only through the latter that the slave comes to perceive and act through the divine.

Elsewhere, the Imam refers to the key supererogatory practice by which this spiritual station is attained. He does this in a commentary upon the following words of a Qurʾānic verse: ***...men whom neither commerce nor trade diverts from the remembrance of God.*** (*Q* 24:36):

> *Truly God has made* remembrance *(al-ḏikr) a polish for the hearts, by which they hear after suffering from deafness, and see after being dim-sighted... There have always been slaves of God... with whom He held intimate discourse through their thoughts, and spoke with them through the substance of their intellects. They radiated through the awakened light in their hearing and their seeing and their hearts, calling unto the remembrance of the days of God.*

The importance of *ḏikr*, both as a principle of awareness of ultimate reality, and as a concrete means of attaining this awareness, is clearly of the utmost importance in the Imam's perspective; and in case one might be wondering whether this is not becoming too remote from the social theme of justice, it would be useful to continue with the above

sermon, where the Imam describes in detail the qualities of these illumined slaves.

> *Truly there are people who belong to dikr, they have adopted it in place of the world, such that neither commerce nor trade distracts them from it; they spend the days of their life in it... they instruct people in justice, and themselves are steadfast therein.*

This is not the place to enter into the metaphysics of this subject, but it is nonetheless necessary to underline that, just as earlier it was seen that the sincerity of a good intention was proven by the effort to realize it, so it is clear now that, in regard to prayer, its sincerity is likewise proven, and rendered efficacious, through sustained effort to prolong and intensify it *though your body be weary*. What this has to do with justice should be clear: if justice is grasped as a quality rooted in the Real, the Truth as such (*al-Haqq*), then one's nearness to the Real cannot but draw one nearer to justice, and to all positive qualities, spiritual, intellectual and moral. Thus, the relationship between worship and justice is altogether indispensable if the conception of justice is to be qualified as sacred. From this perspective, justice is both cause and consequence of worship: on the one hand, justice requires us to put everything in its place; thus God must be given His due, and this entails worship and prayer. On the other hand, justice emerges as a consequence of this worship, as do all the virtues: this, in the measure of the *nearness* (*taqarrub*) granted by God to His worshipper.

We have made occasional references above to some similarities between ideas in the Imam's letter and those discussed in Plato's Republic; and we would like to conclude this essay by suggesting that what we are given by the

Imam in this stress on prayer – together with its essence, the remembrance of God – is a devotional principle which complements the philosophical position of Plato, and might be seen as rendering explicit in spiritual terms what is implied in Plato's pedagogy. After discussing the question of justice at great length, Plato comes, in chapter 23 of The Republic, to address the crux of the matter: the nature of the Sovereign Good, which most concerns the ideal ruler, the guardian, whose moral and intellectual education is at the heart of the practical dimension of the book. "... the highest object of knowledge is the essential nature of the Good, from which everything that is good and right derives its value for us.... I need not tell you that, without that knowledge, to know everything else, however well, would be of no value to us...."

But Plato does not respond to the entreaties of his interlocutors to describe the nature of this Good, offering instead to speak of its "offspring", which means making an analogy between the Good and the sun: what the sun is to visibility, the Good is to intelligibility and being. He proceeds with the famous allegory of the cave and then describes the educational program that would turn the attention of his prospective rulers (the guardians) from the world of shadows to the world of real objects; a programme comprising mathematics, arithmetic, geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, harmonics and dialectic. Having successfully passed through all stages of their education, "when they are fifty, those who have come safely through and proved the best at all points in action and in study must be brought at last to the goal. They must lift up the eye of the soul to gaze on that which sheds light on all things; and when they have seen the Good itself, take it as a pattern for the right ordering of the state and of the individual,

themselves included." But Plato does not anywhere state what this "gazing" actually means, nor how it is to be achieved, by what means, intellective, contemplative or methodic.

It is interesting to note that Ḍiʿlib al-Yamānī, very much after the manner of Glaucon in the Republic, provocatively asked the Imam, "Have you seen your Lord?" To which the Imam replied: *Would I worship that which I have not seen?* Ḍiʿlib then asked: "How did you see Him?" The Imam replied: *Eyes see Him not through outward perception, but hearts perceive Him through the verities of faith...* He then proceeds with a series of paradoxical allusions to the indefinable reality that he has, nonetheless, witnessed by the eye of the purified heart. We are reminded here of the *polishing* of the heart effected by remembrance; and this very word evokes the essence of Plato's approach to knowledge as *recollection* (*anamnesis*). Plato does not, in any of his dialogues, make a direct reference to the devotional or methodic counterpart to his educational and intellective endeavor; while speculation may abound as to whether there was any spiritual method in Plato's teaching – and if there was, why he did not divulge it – the fact remains that Plato's philosophical approach to the Good can be complemented and deepened by an appreciation of the Imam's means of "drawing near" to the Truth, wherein intellectual comprehension and spiritual devotion go hand in hand. Integral, deep-rooted justice emerges as one of the fruits of this "drawing near"; just as, for Plato, gazing on "that which sheds light on all things...the Good itself" results in the capacity to take the Good "as a pattern for the right ordering of the state and of the individual'.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have attempted to sketch the outlines of a spiritual approach to the theme of justice, such as this principally presents itself in the letter of the Imam to Mālik al-Aštar. We are fully aware that we have but skimmed the surface of this important subject, but hope nonetheless to have at least indicated, firstly, that this is a subject of burning relevance to any political discourse worthy of being qualified as "Islamic"; secondly, that the Imam's letters and discourses are a vast and largely untapped source of inspired ideas that can illuminate the role of spiritual principles in formulating ethical values and determining the quality of political practice; and finally, that there can be no fully authentic Islamic approach to politics, society or the individual without taking into account the requirements and the fruits of worship, taking this in its widest sense. Sincere worship transforms the notion of the Absolute into a concrete reality that imparts to the soul an existential impetus, a spiritual resource which buttresses, stabilizes, and deepens one's moral life. What is derived from the consciousness of divine reality is not so much a philosophy of ethics as a "spiritual morality", an ethical orientation that is both the consequence of a lived spirituality and the cause of continuous, dynamic and ever-deepening realization of spiritual truth. Virtue, in such a perspective, becomes *moral truth* or *moral realism*, understanding by realism an assimilation of spiritual reality; and ethical behavior translates that truth and that reality into action on all planes: individual, social and political.

If it be objected that this perspective is hopelessly utopian, the harsh exigencies of politics and the lofty ideals of spirituality being poles apart, we would respond: if no

effort is made to comprehend the deeper aspects of Islamic piety and spirituality, the result of any ostensibly Islamic discourse – whether in politics, sociology, morality or any other field – will be reduced to an outer shell, deprived of the inner life that give its all its meaning and, more importantly, its transformative power. For Islamic concepts to be grasped aright they must, on pain of abstraction, be assimilated not simply by the mind but by the heart. For, as the Imam stresses, it is the heart – the inmost point of one's consciousness – that "sees" the true nature of things. This leads us back to the devotional practices that are all too often regarded as the preserve of a minority – seen as mystical or misguided, depending on one's standpoint – instead of being grasped as a God-given means of reducing the gap between what one aspires to and what one is, of moving from the actual to the ideal, of making concrete what otherwise would remain abstract, of living that which is thought about, and of rendering existentially compelling what otherwise might perhaps be conceptually 'interesting'.

Finally, on a practical note, let it be noted that the Imam's illumination of the principle of justice, although addressed in the first instance to a governor of a province 14 centuries ago, is by no means outmoded. Whether one is operating in an avowedly Islamic or an overtly secular environment, whether the rule be autocratic or democratic, whether political institutions be strong or weak: wherever there are individuals vested with authority – and by that very token, subject to the temptations offered by power – the Imam's principles will not be irrelevant. For these principles do not presuppose any particular form of government, they address the universal theme of moral responsibility, but doing so in terms of that which transcends the level of morality, offering us insights derived from a direct vision of

the ultimate spiritual realities. Being beyond politics, narrowly conceived, the principles are for that very reason capable of penetrating deeply and refashioning, from above, the moral substance of political consciousness. So although the Imam's perspective is particularly pertinent to the interface between spirituality, morality and governance within Islamic discourse, it extends far beyond this context to encompass all those contexts wherein religious belief plays a part in the articulation of moral sensibility and the cultivation of political responsibility.